

# S F HORIZONS

**The Hallucinatory  
Operators  
Are Real**

**WILLIAM  
BURROUGHS**

interviewed on  
Science Fiction

**BRIAN ALDISS**

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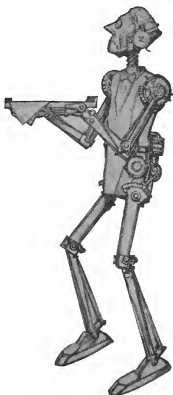
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C. S. Lewis

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SF HORIZONS, No. 2

Winter, 1965



# S F H HORIZONS

## MEGADUNITS

*The Editors*

This magazine, as the observant will have noticed, appears irregularly. It almost died between issues – by what must be regarded as coincidence, since science fiction itself almost died in the same period.

Never has the field yielded such a yawn-provoking crop of reading matter. Every other volume is an anthology or an anthology of anthologies. Even the bad stuff seems to have been in short supply, and the novels contain no novelties. Even the news that Robert Silverberg is re-entering the competition seems to do little to stir the lethargy.

On the other hand, we have watched the growth of a genre that seems to owe a debt to sf, the near-future politically-oriented novel, often written with an eye to serialisation in *Saturday Evening Post*, to becoming a Book Society Choice, to turning into a motion picture. Peter George's "Two Hours to Doom" (American title: "Red Alert"), which became "Dr. Strangelove", fulfilled most of these conditions, Burdick and Wheeler's "Fail Safe" all of them. "Twelve Days in May" and "Advise and Consent" are also within this genre, as is the latest Peter George, "Commander-1". A good earlier example was S. B. Hough's "Beyond the Eleventh Hour".

These novels characteristically have scenes set in the Pentagon and Kremlin; half the characters live in uniform or Washington; the President talks like Henry Fonda. Everyone seems bigger than life, not only because they are destined for the wide screen but because they have the vital fictional asset of characters in a Shakespeare historical play: the fate of nations rests on their every action. The mood is documentary, the talk of emergency and overkill, the tension unrelenting. The corridors of power are well and truly paced and often it is difficult to tell who the real enemy is.

Such megadunits beat sf at its own game, mainly because they at least begin in an environment with which any tv-viewer or newspaper-reader is entirely familiar. And even granted the powers of the

imagination, it is easier to visualise a Russian ICBM in a trans-polar trajectory than a triffid in a ruined supermarket.

Well, if we can't lick 'em, we can join 'em to the extent of claiming that these novels are a part of science fiction. In fact, their ancestry is different, and derives not from the Poe-Verne-Wells axis but the Buchan-Oppenheimer-Bond axis. Megadunits at the least pretend to exist in our actual world and use real events to create their tensions. "Fail Safe" takes the same sort of loving care to describe the War Room at Omaha as Fleming does describing 007's personal armament. Science fiction (with a few notable exceptions like Clarke and Clement) has never cared that much for facts.

Perhaps it is inevitable that while sf is in this low state, the standard of reviewing has dipped perilously as regards both quantity and quality. A reviewer has little to keep him on his toes. Old Sturgeons and Van Vogts continue to appear under new titles; new editions of old titles choke the lists of publishers, so that the English Penguin Books, publishing five "new" sf books in their sf series in July, include another reprint of "the Space Merchants" and a fresh translation of "Journey to the Centre of the Earth". A reviewer naturally responds with idling pulses.

To take two examples of the falling off which are dear to the hearts of the present editors, when one of them put forth a new collection of stories, it received only four reviews in the whole of Great Britain; and when the other of them put forth a novel called "Greybeard", the reviewer of it in "Analog" – once regarded as the leading sf magazine – professed to find in it an accident that "melted the ice caps and raised the seas"; obviously, he was thinking of some other book by some other author he read at some other time.

The editors of this journal do what they can to combat this sort of dimness before dozing off themselves. But in so doing, they have unavoidably to concentrate on the few writers in the field that still show green tips; because of the rarity of these writers, a life-and-death struggle of back-slapping and -stabbing may at first appear to be in progress. For this we can only apologise and say that it shows we are really impartial, and any number can – are invited to – play.

All the same, we undertake that when the next issue appears, it will not contain the names of Blish, Ballard, Harrison, Aldiss, Bradbury, or Knight in the text – or not too often. We may even put out an all-Heinlein issue.

*The Hallucinatory Operators Are Real*

WILLIAM BURROUGHS and his work have formed the centre of a storm of indignation ever since his novel "The Naked Lunch" was published. Succeeding novels, "The Soft Machine" and "The Ticket That Exploded", have done little to calm the tempers of his critics; "Dead Fingers Talk", compiled by a cut-in method from the earlier novels, sent a lot of tempers up a further notch. By far the greater number of critics attacked Burroughs purely from a social rather than a literary point of view, a device with which sf readers have long been familiar.

In this interview, especially tape-recorded for SF HORIZONS in New York, our interviewer asks for Mr. Burroughs' opinions on sf.

SFH: Mr. Burroughs, when I first saw you, you were attending a meeting of the Hydra Club in New York City, New York City's group of science fiction fans and writers. We have all been very much heartened in this small enclave of sf and fantasy writers, to find what a very high sf content *Nova Express* had. And of course this has been widely remarked upon by the reviewers in the general press. We are naturally most interested to know if you are a long time reader of science fiction.

WB: I am indeed a long time reader of science fiction. I remember "Amazing Stories..." what is it? thirty years ago? I've read the science fiction works - of course - of H. G. Wells and Jules Verne. A

number of modern science fiction writers - it has always been a genre that interested me exceedingly.

SFH: Can you tell us, sir, what particular science fiction writers have been of most interest to you?

WB: Well, let me see. There is among the modern writers, well H. G. Wells I've always found to be one of the best, I think. C. S. Lewis is another who interests me very much. "That Hideous Strength" and "Out of the Silent Planet". I found many parallels with my own concepts. And among moderns - other moderns - Mr. Ballard and Mr. Moorcock in England, Mr. Arthur C. Clarke, of course. I can't at the moment think of any others... Mr. Sturgeon, of course.

# GOLLANCZ

## SF

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KURT VONNEGUT

SFH: Am I to gather then, that, in recent years at least, most of your reading has been in the science fiction novel rather than in the magazines?

WB: Both, both . . . I get this quite regularly (holds up a magazine), *New Worlds Science Fiction* which I believe is edited by Michael Moorcock, and I've found some extremely good stories in there. And I also have a number of paperbacks by Mr. Sturgeon, so I'm reading them both, novels and magazines.

SFH: Can you tell us which among these men seems to be closest to the kind of concepts that you are exploring?

WB: Well, I've felt a considerable number of parallels with Mr. C. S. Lewis, that is his concept of the . . . I believe he calls it The Bent One . . . is very similar to my Mr. Bradley - Mr. Martin. That is, this evil spirit that he feels to be in control of the Earth. And also the conspiracy in "That Hideous Strength" was very similar I think to many of the conspiracies that I develop, ideas of conspiracies that I develop in "Nova Express". I'd say that that was the closest parallel among science fiction writers that I can think of.

SFH: Are you familiar with a book called "Operators and Things", written under the pseudonym of Barbara O'Brien?

WB: I have heard of the book and I believe I have looked at it briefly in someone else's house, and have a vague, partial idea as to what it is concerned with. I haven't read it, no. I believe

it is concerned with manipulators and people who are manipulated. And rather, I should say, a state of things in which one must be one or the other, if I'm not mistaken.

SFH: Yes. If I may describe this a little bit more closely for our readers, this is not a fiction work. It is a book by a young woman, a young housewife, who found herself in the midst of a schizophrenic seizure with delusions of reference, and who developed the systematic hallucination that the world was divided largely into *things*, who were people like her, and rather god-like or demonic *figures* who were the operators, who ran them like puppets. And the book is her account of her hallucinatory experiences with these manipulators, with the operators. Now, the reason why I bring this question up is that in "Operators and Things" the woman has now clearly understood that the operators were not real, she wants to tell you that she saw them as real when she was in the midst of her psychotic seizure, but she wishes to tell you that real though this experience was to her, she now clearly realizes that it was hallucinatory. I raise this question because I think it pertains to the "Nova Gang". I have no clear impression myself whether you intended purely for the purposes of the novel to think of these evil operators as being actually real or only symbolic or hallucinatory, covering some other kind of meaning which you wished to convey.

WB: Well, I think the word *real* is a very ambiguous word in-

deed. It has often been my experience when talking to someone during a schizophrenic or so-called psychotic episode, that they made more sense then than they did later, when they decided that all this was not real. Well now, for the whole concept of "Operators and Things", we merely have to look at any modern hierarchic organization to see this quite in real operation. A hierarchical organization like *Time-Fortune*, or Madison Avenue. You talk to people there, and they feel, say someone in the lower echelons, and he feels that he is being manipulated by the people above him and so on up the pyramid. And it is true, and he is, and often with very little consideration for him as an individual. This is certainly true of most large companies. They are valued insofar as they perform certain functions, and that is it. Well this would seem to me to be being treated as a thing; it's one, I should say, one of the great problems of the modern world. Now, whether you regard these operators as - well they certainly are *real* insofar as there *are* office managers, people above office managers, there *are* officers in an army, etc., etc.

SFH: I would certainly agree with that, since I worked for a large corporation myself, but that wasn't quite what I was hoping to drive at. What I really wanted to know was in the context of the novel we have the "Nova Gang" which is certainly a science-fictional idea, these people who are outside our world and yet affect it. Are

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they to be taken as being as real as anybody else in the book, or are they simply symbolic expressions of the kind of hierarchical relationship that we have among each other, that you have just described?

WB: Yes, as I said, I don't feel that the word *real* has any very definite meaning. Yes, I would say that they are as real as any of the characters in the book. Of course the whole book is fiction, it is in a fictional context, and in fiction - as I said, I made the comparison with Mr. C. S. Lewis's "That Hideous Strength", the conspiracy there. Well I think there is no doubt that what Mr. C. S. Lewis - I know people who knew him - felt was that there were conspiracies, actual conspiracies, not dissimilar to this, and that he was talking there about something there, that from yesterday's science fiction can come tomorrow's reality, literally. Actually, "1984" seems a little bit cozy at this point, I think. Rather out of date.

SFH: This raises another interesting question. I have the feeling that fanciful though Lewis's three *Perelandra* novels are, he himself, personally believed in something very like this. That is to say, that although possibly his rather babylonian organization of the material was fanciful, he certainly believed in a God and a devil who were real people to him, and really were operating on the world, and he was trying to make the most artistic organization of this that he could in fiction. I don't take it from your book, sir, that you have the same sense of



personal belief in these outside malign influences that Mr. Lewis did? That is to say almost a religious belief in them?

WB: Well, I'm not a Catholic to begin with. So it is very difficult for me to say to what extent I believe that these represent real forces, real people. To some extent, certainly, it's, I think, very difficult for an author to say precisely to what extent he considers his characters to be real, sometimes they are more real to him than so-called real people.

SFH: One of our editors, Brian W. Aldiss, said some years ago that he felt he was a surrealist at heart, which he defined as feeling that the real world is not entirely what we think it is or the way we see it. And that he felt that only in sf was it possible for him to give a full expression to this feeling. Would you comment on that, sir?

WB: Yes, that seems to me a very understandable point of view, and I have always felt that science fiction is a form that gives you so much leeway that you really can say perhaps more in this form than you can in any other.

SFH: Are you interested in doing short stories in this field, sir?

WB: I have never had much luck with short stories for some reason or another. It has never been a form that I have found myself able to cope with. I suppose I could consider some of the episodes in books that I write as short stories, present them as short stories. Yes, I'd be very interested to experiment.

SFH: I presume you have a new

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work in progress, sir; deos this also contain some science fiction content?

WB: Yes, it does. What I'm working on now is a book of methods really describing the methods that I have used up to the present time with examples, and the examples are from "Nova Express" and "The Ticket That Exploded" and they do contain a science fiction content.

SFH: This I gather however is a nonfiction work about writing rather than a purely creative work in itself?

WB: In a sense, yes, but it amounts to a new form of novel, whereas it is a discussion and explanation of methods it also has characters and action and continuity. It is a little difficult for me to explain in a few

words this quite complicated schemata of this work, which is to be illustrated. It will contain a large number of photos and will be, I think, a fairly expensive book, probably ten or twelve dollars, since it will have a number of illustrations in it.

SFH: What kind of illustrations, sir?

WB: I've done quite a lot of experimenting with newspaper and magazine format, using, applying newspaper and magazine format to literary material. I feel that a great deal of the influence exercised by the press, by a newspaper, is due to the format. That is, while you are reading, concentrating your conscious attention on one story, one item, you are on a subliminal level seeing other pictures, and



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reading other columns. And we know that anything that impinges on the corner of consciousness, as it were, while your conscious attention is directed somewhere else, has to some extent the force of hypnotic suggestion. In other words, people are literally being hypnotized when they read a newspaper – by the format. So I was interested to use this same format in the presentation of literary material, and I have made a number of experiments in this direction. I can show you some of them.

H: This is indeed a very elaborate experiment and, Mr. Burroughs, I gather that you are nearly finished with this work now?

B: Yes, I am; there's quite a bit to be done. I should be

finished with the manuscript in another month, and then there's a production problem, I'm really going to have to work through it page by page with the production manager and the art department. But we hope to have it out next fall or early winter.

SFH: Do you have a title yet, sir?

WB: Well, I have a tentative title which is "Right Where You Are Sitting Now", which the publisher likes pretty well, but I may get another title when I get the manuscript completed. I often find that I get my title after the book is finished, my definitive title.

SFH: May I ask you, sir, are you planning to return to Europe in the near future, or do you plan to stay here?

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WB: I hope to get away for a vacation this summer, but I'm not going to leave until this particular job is finished. So I'll probably take a trip in late August or early September. I plan to go to England and France, and possibly northern Europe, and I may get down to Tangier for a week or so.

SFH: I asked that question in particular because I saw you first at the Hydra Club meeting, and I was curious to know whether you felt any impulse to talk to science fiction writers such as Ted Sturgeon and the other people who have somewhat influenced you. As you probably know the annual World Science Fiction Convention is being held in London this year, over Bank Holiday, and I was wondering whether you might be there?

WB: When is Bank Holiday?

SFH: I don't know exactly when Bank Holiday is, but the convention is being held over the weekend of August 27th to August 30th and will be held at the Mount Royal Hotel in London.

WB: I might quite possibly be there, and I would be most interested to attend if I am in London at the time. That is more or less when I hoped to get away.

SFH: The one last question, sir. You have been reading this material in this genre so long, and have yourself worked with it, do you have any special feeling about the future of this rather narrow little puddle as an influence upon what is usually called mainstream fiction?

**WB:** Well it seems to me that the future of science fiction is practically unlimited. Now that we are entering the space age it is going to become more and more important.

**SFH:** That is a most interesting response, and particularly because so many people who are asked this question often say "Well, now that we are entering the space age, science fiction has already served its function of preparing people to think in this way, and now the newspapers are overtaking it, and soon science fiction will have no function at all." Would you comment?

**WB:** Well, no, that just doesn't sound reasonable to me because the further we go the more horizons will be opened up. It seems to me that science fiction will always be one step ahead of the so-called reality. I mean we haven't even made any landings on the moon yet, let alone on other planets. Of course, science fiction has explored possibilities of other planets, other forms of life quite different from our own. It would seem to me that the contrary is true.

**SFH:** I'm very grateful to you, sir, for your time, and we thank you very much indeed.

**WB:** I'd forgotten one modern science fiction writer that I think very highly of, Mr. E. F. Russell. I thought his book "Three to Conquer" was exceptionally realistic, that is. Some science fiction manages to convince and some does not. That certainly did, I think. And also, he is another writer who has developed ideas quite similar

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to my own, the whole idea of virus invasion is one that I have been very much preoccupied with in "Nova Express" and "The Ticket That Exploded" and other novels.

SFH: Would this be Eric Frank Russell, sir?

WB: Yes, he wrote a book called

"Three to Conquer", about a virus invasion from the planet Venus.

SFH: Well, we hope you will be with us in England this fall, where you will surely meet Mr. Russell among others. Thank you very much, Mr. Burroughs.

WB: Not at all.



## CABINET OF CURIOSITIES. No. 1

"Carefully she aimed at the laughing man from Arcturus, who was advancing towards Stu Blosser, who had nothing to defend himself. Stu raised the pistol to hurl at Ryklo as she fired.

"There was a clang of metal and a shriek of pain from Ryklo as the bullet struck the upraised arm. The smashed zarowzak which had been in that hand fell to the ground.

"Crossing the short distance, Stu grabbed the gun while Ryklo danced in pain, holding onto a broken wrist. He tossed Ryklo's weapon aside. Angie ran forward and thrust the .22 calibre rifle into Stu's hand as he backed out of Ryklo's reach . . ."

Russ Winterbotham: "THE MEN FROM ARCTURUS."

**Calculate (a) the number of weapons involved in the engagement, and (b) what the man from Arcturus found to laugh about.**

***British Science Fiction Now*****Studies of Three Writers**

It is both pertinent and impertinent to look at British science fiction in 1965 – pertinent because it seems to have reached yet another turning point, impertinent because close examination cannot but redden a few faces. Sir Thomas Beecham once referred to English music as ‘a continual series of promissory notes’, and the phrase bobs into one’s mind when one looks at British sf.

Certainly the overall picture appears rosy enough. Wells, Aldous, Huxley, Orwell, and Olaf Stapledon were British. John Wyndham, John Christopher, Arthur Clarke, and Fred Hoyle (‘the rich man’s Arthur Clarke’, as a friend calls him, thus presumably offending both parties) are still flourishing. So is Anthony Burgess, whose “Clockwork Orange” and “The Wanting Seed” make one hope he will follow up these successes. So are a number of competent writers such as Eric Frank Russell, once such a pillar of “Astounding”, John Brunner, Arthur Sellings, Ted Tubb, S. B. Hough (alias Rex Gordon), Charles Eric Maine, J. T. McIntosh, Edmund Cooper, Bertram Chandler, John Rackham, James White, and Michael Moorcock – and the latter may one day find his feet and delight us all.

But the main body of English work is composed by a number of lesser names whose work receives no critical attention – which in a number of cases means merely that they ‘scape whipping – yet whose voices together comprise the rather undistinguished murmur that we must also take into account when we speak of British science fiction.

To speak of it is relevant at present not only because, mainly on account of lack of impetus in American circles, which have supplied the drive in the field ever since early Gernsback days, there are some grounds for claiming that British writers are again making a positive contribution: but because a change has been forced upon us.

The change has come about because several British publishers (to be exact, eight excluding the paperback houses) are now actively engaged in publishing sf or crying aloud for suitable sf to publish; and because the only two British magazines, “New Worlds” and “Science Fantasy”, once edited by Ted Carnell from Nova, have changed hands and editors. They are now published by Roberts and Vinter, and are edited respectively by Michael Moorcock and Kyril Bonfiglioli. These editors are young, neither could be said to be sf fans – Mr. Bonfiglioli is an encouragingly dark horse – and their publishers allow them to pay for material on merit rather than wordage, which is unusual in the sf field.

Both editors have produced some interesting new names, notably Thom Keyes, Keith Roberts, Charles Platt, Jael Cracken and Langdon Jones. It is too early to consider their work yet; a writer is entitled to

a five-year probation period in any case. More significantly, it looks as if some of the old names that appeared in the Nova magazines have disappeared. This is encouraging. Most people in British sf owe much to Carnell – I eagerly place myself among them – but there is no doubt that towards the end of his long and successful reign his interests lay elsewhere, and he let less interesting writers have too great a say.

My first stories all appeared in the Nova magazines, so I can claim to have a vested interest in them. In this article I want mainly to glance at the work of three other writers who also owe their early audiences to Nova. One of them has already made a considerable and controversial name for himself, the other two have attracted little attention; all began to publish in the fifties. I hope to look at their pronouncements on sf as well as their fiction, with a view to stimulating other readers to examine their work more closely. In later issues of SF HORIZONS, I shall consider other similar authors. The trio I wish to deal with this time are J. G. Ballard, Donald Malcolm, and Lan Wright; we will consider them in reverse order.

### **The Knitter of Socks: Lan Wright**

Among the lesser Nova writers, Lan Wright is to be accounted a success. His stories appeared at intervals over a number of years and included three serials: "Dawn's Left Hand", with which we shall be mainly concerned, since it is the high water mark of his art, "A Man Called Destiny", and "Who Speaks of Conquest?", which was a four-parter. A fourth novel appears from Compact soon. To be taken as representative of his shorter work is a novelette entitled "And Earthly Power . . ."

One notices at once this author's choice of poetical titles. Wright, in one of his rare autobiographical pronouncements, mentions this trait with special reference to "And Earthly Power . . .", and incidentally manages to put in a good word for Shakespeare at the same time. He says, "The title bothered me and I eventually fell back on an old standby – Shakespeare. It's surprising how useful the old Bard can still be!"

In "And Earthly Power . . .", one Laraby is sent to an alien planet, Xenon, by an anonymous Bureau, later apparently renamed the Terran Colonial Board, to kill someone called Vincent Audus. The Bureau chief shrugs his shoulders and smiles his dark saturnine smile and sends Laraby off with no more information than that.

Laraby arrives secretly on Xenon and soon finds that the Mayor of Xenon City is one Victor Audus. He watches him in a nightclub. This nightclub is a stylish place according to Wright's slender account; he tells us 'it might have been the 'Stork Club' or the 'Blue Room' back on Earth'. A very good effort, one might say, for a colonial city with only 150,000 inhabitants, one quarter of which are furry slim parthenogenic nomadic Xenians with round lidless eyes and hard almost birdlike beaks.

The enquiry agent whom Laraby hires to investigate the mayor's



background is killed after imparting the information that Victor Audus has a twin brother called Vincent. Apparently Devlin, boss of Security, arranged the agent's murder. This information Laraby gets from the Mayor in a further visit to the night club, which proves much easier to slip in and out of than most terrestrial nightclubs. He holds the mayor up with a needle gun, but apart from laughing grimly, frowning, and shrugging in the darkness, the two get on well together and talk like old friends. This is a recurrent pattern of behaviour in Wright's work: hostility expressed as friendship.

Next, Laraby goes to see Devlin in his office, kills him by a subterfuge too subtle to be divulged here, and manages to hide his body in a cupboard behind the adjustable metal shelves. Soon it is time for Vincent to arrive. A conference concerning the status of colony planets like Xenon is about to take place, and Vincent has been made up to look just like his twin brother, whose place he will take at the conference; the idea is that he will swing the conference against earth and get all the furry slim parthenogenic nomadic Xenians working down the mines, a totally evil idea that Laraby must foil with the mayor's help.

This turns out to be easier than one has the right to expect. Laraby simply ties up the mayor (who is still completely baffled by everything) and puts him on a bed. Almost at once, Vincent arrives from another planet and walks in the door. After some conversation, Laraby shoots Vincent's head off in cold blood. He has carried out his mission. The mayor is, if not horrified, slightly put out at the death of his twin brother. "Did you have to kill him?", he asked huskily.

Laraby reveals he is an executioner. Even this does not seem entirely to satisfy the mayor, perhaps because Laraby is so emotionless. "You're a fool, Audus", Laraby told him calmly. This is a standard Wright-hero way of talking – and his opponents never take offence at the insults. With further bracing words, the two men part for ever.

If a reader's first response to this story is to wonder about Wright's methods of composition, fortunately the author is at hand to tell us how he managed it. In the "New Worlds" Profile that accompanies his tale, he claims, 'There are two ways to write a story – one is to plan the whole thing beforehand so that it is merely a case of putting it on paper; the other is to start writing . . . "And Earthly Power" comes under the second category. It started with one sentence and kept growing like a person knitting a sock who cannot turn a heel.'

Such persons must grow very large.

With none of Wright's other stories are we to be granted such a peep into his creative methods; but internal evidence leads us to believe they are all the work of a writer in the position of someone knitting a sock without being able to turn the heel.

Relaxing though this exercise may be for the writer, it tends to create loose ends. In "And Earthly Power", for instance, Laraby insists on an arrangement with the mayor whereby every time they speak he asks "How is Serenaga?" and the mayor has to answer "I haven't seen him for three years" – an identification device used

notably and often in the old Paul Temple radio detective series. Plainly Wright plants this device because one day it will be the only way for Laraby to tell the mayor and his identical brother apart. However, since in the end Laraby only sees them together, the device is as unnecessary as it is unoriginal.

Apart from this, the story has several facets that spoil a reader's full enjoyment of it. No attempt is made to depict the planet Xenon; such credibility as the story idea possesses would have been enhanced if it had been set in, say, Pakistan, with the machination the work of rival British and Russian or, better, Indian and Chinese factions. But of course that would have needed some knowledge.

Again, everyone in the story is unpleasant, and this includes even people who have no influence on the development. For example, we are told that in the nightclub 'the women (were) as radiant as birds and as beautifully vacant'. I am not persuaded that this is the last word either on birds or women. The protagonists curse to themselves, frown in thought, shrug with apparent disinterest, twist thin lips in sneers, and so on. They never know rest or calm. Though Laraby is decisive enough when it comes to blowing off an opponent's head in cold blood, he is otherwise nervous, undecided, easily caught off his guard, makes mistakes, suffers from nerve flutter, and so on. This is not just particular characterisation; all Wright's heroes suffer from the same sort of disorder. They are not people one cares to identify with.

Nor is the amorality of the characters – a hostile critic might call it callousness – there as character-drawing; it suffuses the whole text. The mayor, as we have seen, is a bit upset by the killing of his brother, but he soon rationalises it all in a way that is reported like this: 'He felt small and insignificant beside the vastness of the machine around him – a machine called Mankind that moved with unstoppable determination towards an ultimate end which he would never see; a machine that cast off its (sic) broken parts with a ruthlessness that was as implacable as the ambition that drove it. His brother had been one of those parts.'

Clearly, if one has this attitude towards men and women, there is little room for compunction – or characterisation. What is extraordinary is that in the circumstances Wright should wish to quote the old Bard. For those less familiar with Shakespeare than our author, the lines from which his title is taken come from Act IV of "Merchant of Venice" and run 'And earthly power doth then show likest God's When mercy seasons justice'. It is hard to see where the element of mercy enters in Wright's story.

"And Earthly Power..." appeared between Wright's first novel, "Who Speaks of Conquest", and his second, "A Man Called Destiny". When the latter was being serialised in "New Worlds", Ian Wright popped up in Profile again and had a few words with us as a 'writer of good, average, but never – I hope – poor stories'. After cautioning us about the superiority of novels (which he writes) over short stories (which he doesn't care to write any longer), he tells us, 'I write for pleasure as much as for profit and, as a result, I write stories that give

me great enjoyment in the writing. If my second novel "A Man Called Destiny" which you are now reading gives as much pleasure as the first one - "Who Speaks of Conquest" - then my job will have been well done and "New Worlds" will earn a lot more well deserved credit for its publication.'

This is not the most modest remark ever to come from an author. It contains an assumption Wright makes elsewhere, that the amateur writer is better than the professional because he can write what pleases him, whereas the professional author only writes for money. This is very well as far as it goes; obviously we have to look about and find what sort of things please an amateur like Wright.

Fortunately, Wright is always outspoken, and we find just what we want in the Guest Editorial he wrote for "New Worlds". The burden of this manifesto is that good writers of science fiction don't/shoudn't (which is not too clear) write fiction that contains any message. A message is defined at one point as 'something to say.' This puts most of us in Mr. Wright's bad books straightaway, but we are in good, if mixed, company: 'Did Ethal M. Dell or C. S. Forester or Nevil Shute have a hidden meaning - something to be chewed over and discussed? Of course not!' This palpable hit is followed up by another knowing reference to the old Bard. 'I'd hazard a guess that Shakespeare wrote for financial reward and left it for future generations of critics and experts to read "messages" into his work.' This is confusing, for here the old Bard is plumped firmly with Goodies like Ethel M. Dell, whereas as one who heinously wrote for financial reward he is plainly Professional and thus in the Baddies slot.

But I let my enjoyment of Mr. Wright's dialectic run away with me. We are looking for what pleases our author. While he is somewhat reticent on this, apart from another confession of how much he enjoys his own tales, he is loud about what he does not like, from which the obverse may be deduced. He speaks picturesquely of the 'successive pundits (who) have implored to the heavens that sf, to be acceptable to the general public, must make its message clear.' A few names might have helped us here, but no matter. He continues, 'It must have general appeal; writers must adapt their styles; editors must encourage new writers with new ideas; a new flame must be lit to send a great message to all the great mass of the ignorant...' This sounded to me at first reading like a reasonable if dogmatic programme for sf, but what does Wright call it? 'Semi-pathological pap'.

Here is an author of marked likes and dislikes. His opinions are entitled to respect, however intemperately he expresses them, particularly when he puts them into action. Accordingly, we are entitled to look forward with some excitement to his next and culminating novel, the quintessence and exemplar of his experience and beliefs. "Dawn's Left Hand" was serialised in "New Worlds" early in 1963. The title is borrowed from old Omar. Without doubt, it is Wright's most successful book, and was published after some delay late in 1964 by Herbert Jenkins as a cloth-bound book.

The Nova "New Worlds" serialised many novels, some of which,

like Kornbluth's "Take-Off" or Charles Eric Maine's "Countdown", were already scheduled for hardcover publication. Of the novels written specially for the magazine, only two managed to stagger through to the dignity of hardcover presentation, Ted Tubb's "Window on the Moon", and "Dawn's Left Hand", both of which appeared in the same Herbert Jenkins series as, respectively, "Moon Base" and "Space Born".

Since Wright found nothing to revise in the earlier version, the texts of serial and book are identical, except for a printer's error "where" for "were" on p. 143 of the bound edition.

The plot of "Space Born" is again based on mistaken identity. There is a trail to be followed, and various denouements along its way, some of which come off as surprises, even if they are not particularly well handled. To write a novel, which after all is an immense and unnatural labour, we must be recreating some ideal that we have within us, an ideal (perhaps of a way of living) that cannot be achieved in any other way. This applies as much to Spenser's "Faerie Queene" as to the lowest bit of pornography. A large percentage of the ideal is generated by memories of other books, whose essence we may unknowingly wish to recreate from motives of admiration or hatred. Only the greatest writers, and not many of them, are free of this literary heritage or would wish to be; James Joyce parades his debt to Homer. Ian Wright parades his debt to a hundred forgotten detective stories.

Martin Regan is travelling on a space ship, sharing a cabin with a Manuel Cabrera, when the ship is blown to pieces by an explosion. Regan is the only one to survive. An alien race, the Licharians, rebuilds his broken body, giving him plastic surgery and prosthetic limbs and new eyes – and the eyes and limbs are far more powerful than his old ones. But he has been mistaken for Manuel Cabrera, and is left with no way of proving his real identity.

The Cabrera family comes to claim him, and mixed bag they are: Carlo, sometimes referred to as dark-skinned, sometimes as 'the black man', Armand, fair-haired and white-skinned, and Cabrera, who seems to have no other name, old and grey. Later, other members of the family appear, notably Manuel's sister, Giselle, described as tall and statuesque, with 'a beauty that had its origin in centuries of breeding'. We are not much astonished later to find Giselle can ride a horse – evidently intended for a stallion by its description, 'a great black animal'.

The family discover Regan is not Manuel, but keep the knowledge to themselves for their own ends. There is a personal carrier belonging to Manuel that would destroy itself if any but he opened it. It is for this reason that the Cabrerases and other agents wish to get hold of Regan. Manuel had information concerning some colony worlds and Earth. Earth is over-built and overcrowded, and is running low on oxygen, so that at any time a plague may sweep it and kill all its inhabitants; which will suit the colony worlds. The carrier contained information on this situation.

Things seem at an impasse, until Giselle rides up on her great black animal and tells Regan that Manuel once advised her not to forget the name of a planet, Cleomon, or the name of a man, Plender. Inspired by this advice, Regan sets off for Cleomon on spec, in one of Cabrera's spaceships, with Carlo aboard for unwanted company. They get there in no time, and in no time discover that Plender was murdered some while ago. They meet Plender's lawyer and discover that Plender was negotiating with Manuel over two Earth-type planets which were suitable for colonisation.

Carlo and Regan decide to go to these planets. On the way, they are met in space by two more Cabrera ships, with old Cabrera aboard one of them. They all land on the new planet.

There they find Manuel is still alive. He engineered the destruction of the space cruiser with sixty-eight people aboard, and killed Plender. He claims that he is now organising the two new planets to receive millions of terrestrial colonists, to relieve the situation on Earth. But Regan realises the truth, that this man is evil and waiting for Earth and the colonial planets to destroy themselves in war so that he will be the one person left with power.

When Regan taunts Manuel with this, the latter flings himself on him, calling for assistance from Armand, the fair-haired, white-skinned one, who was secretly acting on his behalf on earth.

Driven into a 'terrible rage' by this piece of information, Regan accidentally mashes Manuel into pulp with his prosthetic limbs until he finally allows 'the dead crushed body of Manuel Cabrera to fall to the ground there to lay (sic), twisted and crumpled, upon the green grass'.

Fortunately, old Cabrera does not seem to mind. Indeed, he pokes the body with his stick, says it was not his son and declares that Regan is instead. Then he walks stiffly into the house, Carlo ushers away tottering weeping Armand, and Regan is left in the garden to wonder how he can marry his sister.

Respecting Lan Wright's hostility to the writing or finding of messages ('something to say'), I will not try to interpret what he is trying to say in "Space Born". Indeed, if as I suspect this novel was knitted by his well-known sock method, the chances are that it is too shapeless to have anything coherent to convey.

But even an extreme distaste for the ethics of the story should not prevent one looking at its literary methods; if we have no particular interest in Wright himself, his way of working may shed light on others like him.

For internal evidence about the sock method, we have only to look at the plot. This dies out about page 109, bound edition; at this point, the possibilities of Regan having or finding or opening the 'personal carrier' are exhausted and the matter is never referred to again. It is hard for us to see what can happen next, as in the tradition of the best suspense stories. Readers with any sympathy for an author in such a predicament, landed with almost another thirty thousand words to go, may fancy they detect something autobiographical in a curious passage

that occurs on page 109: 'His thoughts ran in endless circles which led him nowhere; they ran riot, seeking order out of chaos, but, as the answers failed to come, he allowed himself to drift into an aura of well-being. He dozed lightly, and lay at peace for he knew not how long.'

However, like an anima arriving in the nick of time, Giselle appears on her great black animal on the next page and whispers to him the name of a planet and a man, whereupon Regan and plot can start off again at top speed.

In examining the character of Regan, we may begin with his laziness. We have already caught him dozing. He does plenty of sleeping, and often lies on his bed; for six months, of course, he is completely out of action in a hospital bed, but only a psychologist would make anything out of that. Yet one remembers that Laraby in "And Earthly Power . . ." was also a one for lying down and just thinking.

There are other affinities with Laraby. Regan is another uneasy man. At one point, he feels an icy wind blowing through him. His stomach turns over, he is forever going cold and stirring imperceptibly, he chuckles coldly, he sneers, he snaps, he sits numbed with shock, and he is also extremely ill-mannered. (When old Cabrera begins to discuss Malthus, "'I read history in college," said Regan shortly', perhaps under the impression that Malthus was an historian.)

Some of these nervous traits seem at first glance rather curious ones to find in a man who consists of an entirely artificial body – a machine, in fact, built by an alien race. What has happened, I suppose, is this: that Wright's preoccupation with the human race as a remorseless machine that moves with unstoppable determination (in "Who Speaks of Conquest?" it is assumed that the human race would arise in a 'great rage' and automatically wipe out a gentle galactic race that has watched over them for half a million years) has become embodied now in the person of Regan. Whereas in the earlier tale, it was mankind that 'cast off its broken parts with a ruthlessness that was . . . implacable', now Regan has taken over this role. This impression is reinforced by the way the Lithians, who perform the wonder operation on Regan, afterwards fade completely from the story, where consistency calls for their continued appearance in it.

If this preoccupation with man as a rather horrid machine had been faced and consciously used, it might have made a powerful novel; but this would have needed skill and consistent characterisation.

For any sort of machine, Regan is remarkably indecisive, and towards the end of the book loses the initiative to Carlo.

Regan is also billed as sarcastic and a master of repartee, a sample of which is given when he confronts a rival menace, Malatest.

"'I find your attitude ridiculous," snapped Malatest.

"'And I find yours ludicrous."'

We will return to the subject of Regan's continuous unpleasantness presently. First we must examine how Wright builds up the picture of Regan as cool and ruthless only to destroy it by showing him vacillating and feeble.

An interesting example of feebleness comes early on, when he finds

himself in the same cabin as Manuel Cabrera. 'All he wanted now was to get away from Cabrera for a short while. The man was too demanding to be pleasant, and Regan disliked the way in which he managed to worm information from him, without giving away the slightest hint of his own business. "I think I will take a meal," he told Cabrera, and then, reluctantly, "Will you join me?"' Only extreme chuckle-headedness could drive a man to act in this manner. It forms another example of hostility expressed as friendship.

Perhaps in an attempt to show that Regan has a gentler side as well as one of sarcastic idiocy, Wright has him apologise several times, always baldly with the words "I am sorry". The funniest example of this case comes at the end when, having mashed Manuel to a bloody pulp, Regan 'spread wide his hands in a gesture of hopeless repentance. "I - I am sorry - "'.

Returning to the question of Regan's unpleasantness, we find that the other characters generally ignore his sneers or else applaud them. The only exception to this seems to be when Regan has said something particularly offensive to one of the Cabrera family at whose table he is guest. Then, 'the humourless smile and the faint flush that darkened Simon's cheeks told him that the shaft had not been misplaced'. I say this seems to be an exception to the rule that Regan's thrusts are applauded; in fact, the phrase 'the shaft had not been misplaced', is Wright's applause for his wit.

This brings us to one of the most notable weapons in Wright's literary armoury, one that few professional writers would dare use so openly. He is his own clique.

Wisely uncertain whether his audience will always take his point, he underlines each by having the characters comment on it admiringly, or by commenting on it admiringly himself. Thus, when Regan finds Carlo on his spaceship, he is 'shaken from his placidity by the *complete unexpectedness* of the man's presence.' When he, in his turn, bests Carlo by getting the ship to head for an unknown planet, instead of being furious, "I think," said Carlo softly, "that we may have underrated you, Regan." When we learn that Plender was murdered, Regan goes *numb with shock*, though he especially might have foreseen something of the sort. A few pages later, another plot twist makes 'his senses reel slightly with the *shock*.' As for the moment when he experiences Wright's big surprise and finds Manuel is still alive, this jars him into 'a world that had suddenly exploded round him . . . all he was aware of was a *cold wonder* . . .'

By this time, we are near the end of the story. The sock-knitting method that has on the whole carried the author safely through his self-appointed task now shows signs of letting him down, almost as if he did not see how to turn the heel. In the twelve rather light pages of chapters 24 and 25, there are forty-five questions asked, eighteen of them by Regan; sometimes they come so close together as to make him seem almost like a babbling idiot. Perhaps this impression is coloured by his murdering Manuel, after which 'Regan wondered stupidly why Manuel was so still'. But we must take the final sentence,

in which he thinks about marrying Giselle, as evidence that he is still human and that humanity will continue. This, we might assume, was the author's message, if he did not warn us against such assumptions.

The similarities between Regan and Laraby in "And Earthly Power . . ." lead us to see a curious identity of pattern between the endings of the two stories. When Laraby has murdered Vincent Audus, he says good-bye to Vincent's brother, the mayor of Xenon City, and the mayor, far from refusing to shake hands with Laraby, does so rather warmly and is converted to Laraby's attitude to humanity as a machine. In "Space Born", we have the same unusual situation of a brutal murderer being approved by a close relation of the dead man, a brother in one case, a father in the other, while the mutilated body is still lying before them. Authors like Ian Fleming and Spillane have sometimes been castigated for morally offensive scenes in their novels, but they never produced anything like this. One is even tempted to think that Wright might have saved his sternly critical 'Semi-pathological pap!' for a better occasion.

I am aware that this brief analysis of "Space Born" leaves much to be desired; I realise I have left much of it unelucidated. In defence I can only claim that as far as I know nobody before this – excepting the author himself – has looked at all closely at the works of Lan Wright. Perhaps they have been warned off by the withering sarcasm he directs at all who might try to do so. Although my own view is that there are several sf writers rather like Mr. Wright whose oeuvre could profitably be examined, I must allow him to have the last word on this subject.

Of Heinlein's "Starship Troopers", we find him saying, 'It is not, cannot be (and probably never was intended to carry) any sort of philosophic message. Any message has been grafted on by a semi-intellectual hysteria emanating from pseudo-intellectual morons who batten on the ideas of others under the grossly misused heading of "criticism" . . . Most writers write because they enjoy it – they write for fun, and if editors like John Carnell are prepared to pay for their efforts then so much the better – but messages? God Save Us All! Amen to that.

### **Beyond the Reach of Criticism: Donald Malcolm**

The rancorous universe of Lan Wright is a long way from the genial and poetic world built up by Donald Malcolm, the Scottish author who is the second writer we have to discuss. His is another Nova-bred talent, but whereas it is some while since Wright produced a story, Donald Malcolm is very active. He has appeared in one of the Roberts and Vinter magazines, is organising a Scottish sf Convention, and reviews books occasionally – an activity almost certain to infuriate Mr. Wright.

Whereas Wright seems to have played no part in the sf world, and delivered few comments on other writers, Malcolm belongs to the British Interplanetary and other societies, and delivers opinions here



and there in what some may think of as a rather jolly knock-about way. His opinion of J. G. Ballard's "The Terminal Beach" (the story, not the collection of that name) was that it is 'tripe' and 'codswallop'. This is at least honest, and he has been careful under his seeming carelessness to express admiration for many other Ballard stories. He can generally be found conducting a jovial-pugnacious correspondence with the robust type of fan in the correspondence columns of "Vector", the BSFA journal.

Malcolm's first three stories appeared in "New Worlds". The first story of Malcolm's I read appeared in "Nebula" in 1958, and was entitled "Lone Voyager". It was a pleasant little tale of intelligent dogs in space. Malcolm has yet to give us a novel or publish a collection of short stories, so our examination of him will be brief and confined mainly to quotation, in which his individual quality shows best. Here is an extract from "Twice Bitten", which shows his attempt at a poetic style of writing.

'The fateful day dawned as the warming star breathed life into the heady, exhilarating air. The sleepy land, a-glitter with a profusion of star-bright dew drops, rolled with the assuredness of all eternity to the horizons. The trees reached politely for the first, tentative caressing fingers of sunlight, while the flowers, of all the subtle hues on nature's palette, prepared to receive their humble share.

'The river delta exploded into a vast, living chequer-board of pink and grey as the thousands of waders raised a raucous cacophony, and the waters chuckled merrily at their cumbersome performance.'

A ripe example of the pathetic fallacy, some might think, but the image of trees reaching politely for sunlight is certainly striking.

In "Twice Bitten", we have a group of explorers who eventually make telepathic contact with intelligent bees. In "Beyond the Reach of Storms", we have the same situation, though this time the group of explorers is far away in space, and the intelligence is a scintillating column.

Before we embark on "Beyond the Reach of Storms", it may be worth looking at Malcolm's critical manifesto - for he, like all other writers anywhere near the Nova orbit, produced a Guest Editorial. Compared with some of the frenzied polemics with which we were bombarded (most authors turned the occasion into a free clouting match), Malcolm was reason and mildness personified - mild almost to the point of insipidity, at times. It would be difficult to quarrel with such statements as: 'A story with the elements of theme, plot, dialogue, action, characterisation and sheer good writing *correctly apportioned* has an above average chance of having writing's most elusive element, quality.'

In the main, his argument is that sf does not appeal to a vast readership. He sensibly refuses to believe this indicates that therefore the vast readership are morons, as other writers sometimes do; he holds that if sf and sf magazines were altered so that they had a wider appeal, they would probably cease to attract the present sf readers.

He makes a just remark, I think, on Ian Wright's pet phobia, the

subject of message ('something to say'). 'In passing, I record my agreement with John Rackham that all stories have a message. It's impossible to write a story without one, however trivial it may be. Chaplin's "City Lights", or most of the O. Henry tales, are examples where the message (or the moral) is expertly woven into the fabric of the story, not merely tagged on like a button.'

Malcolm would probably agree that his own 'something to say' was intrinsic and not merely tagged on like a button. His explorers can talk with intelligent bees and scintillating columns because there is a general humanitarian good, with a wish-to-understand, at large in the universe. This seems a welcome contrast to the general attitude of doubt and - but the word is thrown about too lightly - pessimism that many sf writers share, myself among them. It remains to be seen how this cheerfulness finds expression in Malcolm's work, and particularly in "Beyond the Reach of Storms".

Before the telepathic scintillating column is reached, not a great deal happens. The members of the exploration party have nothing to do but sit about and talk. Malcolm, however, is unrivalled at finding them things to say in different ways and actions to perform at the same time. To get the full benefit of this process, let us concentrate on the crew, and their lively actions and mannerisms, while leaving out their dialogue, which is often rather less interesting.

'Bond stretched and advised... Coleman quipped and ducked expertly under a half-hearted swipe at his ear... He admitted, thumbing the button and speaking to the bridge... Coleman asked innocently. Bond listened drowsily, his expression bored... Coleman responded sweetly... Bond urged him disapprovingly... Coleman led King on... The officer scoffed, chuckling... He replied, the chuckle still evident in his voice... He grinned... Bond, all set to castigate him with a few biting words, relapsed into taciturnity. Coleman said, grinning happily... Bond shook his head wonderingly...'

Now Malcolm is well launched on his theme, and characterisation comes thick and fast, particularly deft use being made of a cigar.

'... Rang said, smiling faintly at his own exactitude. He drew on his cigar... Coleman gave Bond a hefty prod and the Canadian answered... Hird nodded as Bond said... Rang, his cigar clamped at one corner of his mouth... he demanded in low, fierce tones... Ronnie answered, managing to keep the right note of seriousness in his voice... Captain Rang, cigar poised like a sawn-off conductor's baton, asked politely... Coleman told him, his face flushed... Rang drew thoughtfully on his cigar and said... His dark, handsome eyes were twinkling as he moved away... The duty steward knocked and entered the observatory with coffee, and poured it briskly... Hird, small and stoop-shouldered, looked like one of the three witches as he hunched over his mug...'

Over the next page, Malcolm follows up this remarkable simile by interspersing the idle conversation with news of how the coffee is going down, though he takes care not to entirely neglect Rang's smoking habits.

Hird nodded at his colleague, who after his bout of syringomyelia, was still pale and shrunken . . . Hird's narrow shoulders jerked in a sketchy shrug . . . Captain Rang, selecting another cigar, said . . . King acknowledged, saluting . . . Jim King helped himself to another mug of coffee and started to drink it quickly . . . He said, without rancour, between gulps . . . Coleman asked slyly, smiling at King's mournful expression . . . King mocked, bowing elaborately . . . He finished his drink and returned to the bridge . . .

Plainly, we are now getting to the heart of the matter, and in the next section, the banter is performed by an increasingly international cast of lively people. Happily, Captain Rang is still with us.

The Captain began, lighting a cigar . . . Hird hunched in his seat, looking like a thinned-down version of some video actor trying to think himself into the part of the Hunchback . . . Ray Dainty, the moody, chain-smoking Head of Team 29's A.S., stopped puffing long enough to mutter . . . Hird acknowledged dryly, his dislike showing . . . Blowing delicate smoke rings, Captain Rang said . . . Hird admitted, with genuine admiration . . . Rang begged, very politely . . . Hird glanced at the questioner, Sam Slater, the Negro Head of Team 30's A.S., and potentially the most brilliant astronomer aboard the ship . . . He answered slowly . . . Eugene Smirnov, of Team 32, asked, adjusting his rimless glasses, his sole personal affectation amid a stern Russian exterior . . . He drew his shoulders forward and chewed on a knuckle . . . Said the hitherto silent Team 27 Head, Ferenc Sandor, a pulsatingly handsome Hungarian . . . He went on in his musical voice . . . At length, Sam Slater commented wonderingly . . . Captain Rang, who had been thinking that another cigar might help him to keep on top of what might have been an obtuse wrangle, remarked . . . Ray Dainty, lighting a new cigarette off the stub of the old one, said . . . He left the notion dangling and contemplated the glowing end of his cigarette . . . Captain Rang endorsed . . .

Skipping a couple of pages, we find Malcolm flowing on inexhaustably. Now he has some new characters with new features to offer us, fully the equal of anything that has gone before.

Preston Manson's gnome-like face, which resembled a crab apple with features appended, creased until his eyes had all but submerged themselves in the thin folds of skin. This, with him, was always a preliminary to speech . . . He shook his head a couple of times . . . Manson responded, glancing at Drake, who was scribbling on a notepad . . . Drake removed his pipe from his humorous cavern of a mouth and agreed with Manson, saying . . . Came Gall's slightly breathless comment . . . Captain Rang summed up, smoke exhaling with the words . . . Dave Hird, a sly grin on his face, commented . . . His expression was a mixture of savagery and gentleness. His words were vibrant . . . Senior Team Leader Matthew Brady, of Team 31, rubbed his comical, potato-shaped nose and said . . . Brady coiled a forefinger round his nose . . . Rang's eyes maintained their steady scrutiny of Brady. He disposed of his cigar and said . . . Brady glanced at Captain Macauley, who nodded faintly, as if in encourage-

ment, then continued... Rang frowned slightly and selected a cigar... Manuel de Ribera, his fine Spanish features filmed with sweat, answered in soft, sun-nurtured tones... Rang allowed himself a smile and Macauley returned it... Len Kitten, of Team 32, asked Brady, catching him by the arms... His voice was rising to a shriek, but quietened just as suddenly. He shivered uncontrollably and turned away from Brady, his questions forgotten...

There, at a moment of crisis, we have to leave them all. Apart from Brady, the potato-nosed one, the sweating de Ribera, and Captain Rang, none of the brave and active people we have met, joking, chattering, smoking, and gesticulating, ever appear in the story again, though we have covered eighteen pages of the story and there are only half that number to go.

The antics of the people in "Twice Bitten" are fully as amusing; we have shown preference for "Beyond the Reach of Storms" only because it is possibly Malcolm's best-known story. Appearing first in "New Worlds", it was reprinted in the collection "Lambda I and Other Stories", as published in Great Britain by Penguin Books; unfortunately, it was not included in the American edition of this title published by Berkley. Since this anthology was collected by Ted Carnell from "New Worlds" and published after the Nova magazines had changed hands, we may regard it as something of a definitive statement.

Oddly enough, presumably because of copyright difficulties, "Lambda I", does not contain a story by J. G. Ballard – or by Ian Wright, for that matter. This may be because Carnell's professed intention was to bring before the British public some of "the newer authors... although their reputations are high abroad, they seem to remain unhonoured and unsung in the homeland", a statement missing in the Berkley edition.

Fortunately, Ballard redresses the balance by two recently published volumes, one of which is a collection of short stories entitled "The Terminal Beach", in which four – including the title story that critic Malcolm terms 'codswallop' – appeared in "New Worlds" under the Carnell regime. The second volume is a novel, "The Drought". It is to Ballard's writing, the subject of much recent discussion, that I would now like to turn.

### **The Wounded Land: J. G. Ballard**

"Terminal Beach" is a much better collection than we have any right to expect in this wicked world. Not only have the stories virtue in their own right; they show Ballard developing in a way that did not seem likely from his earlier writing.

Ballard's first (English) volume, "Four Dimensional Nightmare", showed him limited as to subject. There were too many stories about time, more particularly about the stoppage of time. In the new volume, he remains limited as regards theme, but the limitation represents an absorbed concentration and the theme pours forth its rewards. And that in fact is his theme: that limits whether voluntary

or imposed bring ample compensation by deflecting attention to occurrences and states of mind not available to the 'normal' world-possessed man.

Not the least damn bit incidentally, as H. L. Gold once put it, this is also a parallel with Ballard's own position in the science fiction field. By refusing to go joy-riding all over the universe, he has brought his readers more rich strangeness than any hack ever dredged out of far Andromeda.

Some of the best stories in the "Terminal Beach" collection hover – as all good sf should – on the verge of being something other than sf. "The Drowned Giant", for instance, is an apparently straightforward eyewitness account of the dismemberment of a gigantic, though otherwise human, body cast up on an unspecified shore. The manner of telling recalls such stories of Kafka's as "Metamorphosis" or "The Giant Mole". It begins with this sentence: 'On the morning after the storm the body of a drowned giant was washed ashore on the beach five miles to the north-west of the city.' The important thing, the narrator tells us, is to remember where the giant appeared, not the fact that he was a giant; to be amazed would be impolite. And by describing the dismemberment of the giant corpse, Ballard weans us of our desire to know where he came from. He concentrates on the important things, and by so doing makes the ends pursued by most sf seem trivial ones. In the hands of the first fifty sf writers you care to name, this story would end with other giants coming down from Akkapulko XIV to rescue him, and the shooting beginning. By eschewing sensationalism, Ballard makes us realise how much sf is given over to sensationalism.

### **The Unifying Wit**

He replaces sensationalism with wit. The critics have not noticed how witty Ballard is, yet a unifying wit is his dominant characteristic. Fandom seems to have decided he is the prophet of despondence and let it go at that. Ballard is seldom discussed in fanzines (nor for that matter is anyone but Heinlein), but the occasional reference tends to be disparaging. Thus a correspondent in "Vector" calls Ballard a 'melancholy johnnie'. An instance of Ballard's wit is the dry way the pedantry of Pelham is drawn in "The Reptile Enclosure". (Chatting to his wife on the beach, Pelham remarks, "It's remarkable how popular sunbathing has become", and cannot resist adding, "It was a major social problem in Australia before the Second World War.") The situation in "Bilenium", where seven people move one by one into a small room, is treated with an appreciation of its comic side, while irony is always present in Ballard's writing, often seeming to turn against the author himself, except on the rare occasions when it is dethroned by melodrama. "Track 12", an early story, skilfully combines melodrama and irony, where a man is drowned to the amplified noise of his own adulterous kiss.

"A Question of Re-entry", which deals with a Lieutenant in the Amazon, looking for a missing astronaut, has a humorous denouement,

if the humour is wry. But Ballard's wit lies chiefly in imagery that, like the imagery of such metaphysical poets as Carew or Donne, can surprise and delight by its juxtaposition of hitherto separate ideas. In "The Drought", such imagery is, perhaps appropriately, more dessicated, more of the order of Ransome's remark to Catherine: "I've always thought of the whole of life as a kind of disaster area." Such juxtapositional imagery abounds in "The Terminal Beach". Here is a sample from the eponymous story: 'The series of weapons tests had fused the sand in layers, and the pseudo-geological strata condensed the brief epochs, micro-seconds in duration, of thermo-nuclear time.' Paradox is closely allied to this form of wit and in fact this passage continues, 'Typically the island inverted the geologist's maxim, 'The key to the past lies in the present'. Here, the key to the present lay in the future. This island was a fossil of time future, its bunkers and blockhouse illustrating the principle that the fossil record of life was one of armour and the exoskeleton.'

Traven's minute vision, exemplified in the above-quoted passage, is sharpened by premonitions of death. He is metaphorically in the same position as Knight, in an early novel of Thomas Hardy's, "A Pair of Blue Eyes". Knight clings desperately to the face of a tall cliff; like Traven, he is isolation personified, and the author makes his predicament stand for all mankind. A few inches from Knight's eyes, a fossil is embedded in the cliff, regarding him sightlessly. 'It was the single instance within reach of his vision of anything that had ever been alive and had had a body to save, as he himself had now . . . He was to be with the small in his death . . . Time closed up like a fan before him. He saw himself at one extremity of the years, face to face with the beginning and all the intermediate centuries simultaneously.'

Hardy's intentions here (and often elsewhere) are to achieve the sort of *sf* frisson that Ballard is after. Indeed, an echo of Hardy's fossil episode may be found in Ballard's "Deep End" (contained in "The Terminal Beach") where the solitary fish that Holliday discovers in a pool is intended as a symbol of life – in "The Drought" this symbol is perhaps the dominant one. It is not my intention to draw strong parallels between Ballard and Hardy – parallels which I do not believe are there – but there are times when Ballard, in using symbols to convey massively passing time in a somewhat cumbrous prose, sounds remarkably like the great Victorian novelist: 'But the enigmatic presence of the terrace city, with its crumbling galleries and internal courts encrusted by the giant thistles and wire moss, seemed a huge man-made artefact (sic) which militated against the super-real naturalism of the delta. However, the terrace city, like the delta, was moving backwards in time, the baroque tracery of the serpent deities along the friezes dissolving and being replaced by the intertwined tendrils of the moss-plants, the pseudo-organic forms made by man in the image of nature reverting to their original.' (From "The Delta at Sunset").

In this extract, too, one sees at work the sort of wit of which I was speaking earlier – a unifying wit that seems to me entirely successful. Sometimes one detects the writer having a joke with himself. For

instance, in "The Terminal Beach", a young woman flier arrives on the blasted island. Traven sees her and 'as she turned, Traven rose involuntarily, recognising the child in the photograph he had pinned to the wall of the bunker'. What a twist in the plot that would be, how welcome in the slicks and the sticks, with its breath of conventional romance! But Ballard continues unfalteringly, 'Then he remembered the magazine could not have been more than four or five years old'.

The unifying wit seeks always to combine opposites and incongruities. In "The Subliminal Man" (published in "New Worlds" and not yet collected), the hideous giant subliminal signs are erected all over town but, as 'an appeal to petty snobbery, the lower sections had been encased in mock-Tudor panelling' - a typical wry Ballard joke. In "The Drought", Catherine strides along with her white lions, a contrast of weak and strong, Mrs. Quilter is buried in the back seat of a limousine. These are typical instances of college methods, the wit of a cataloguer who is discontented with everyone else's categories. They represent a sensible attempt to deal with the dislocations of our times, and are Ballard's most notable contribution to science fiction.

### **Dethronement of the Hero**

Humour is not Ballard's forte, however much wit is. The most serious flaw in the best Ballard novel, "The Drowned World", is the villainous Strongman who, with his alligators, his 'handsome saturnine face', his 'crisp white suit, the silk-like surface of which reflected the gilt plate of his high-backed Renaissance throne', and his henchman, 'a huge hunchbacked Negro in a pair of green cotton shorts . . . a giant grotesque parody of a human being' reminds one irresistably of the pre-war villains in "Boy's Own Paper" or "Modern Boy". "Modern Boy's sf hero, Captain Justice, with his 'cigar in mouth, cap tilted jauntily over one eye', is characterised about as subtly as Strangman. One laughs at the latter chiefly, I think, because the author does not; indeed, Strangman is designed as some sort of apocalyptic figure with great significance in the plot. He buckles under the weight of the author's intentions and is forgotten as soon as he disappears, leaving Kerans to his love-hate relationship with the smouldering submerged world about him.

As I say, one laughs; yet it is a mistake to underestimate Ballard. And it may even be that on a deeper level Strangman is intended as parody. There are frequent signs in Ballard's work that he is parodying or mocking or at least remembering all the bad things of the medium in which he has chosen to write (often it is difficult for the intelligent sf writer to do otherwise); we have already had one such example, where Traven thinks he recognises the girl aviator.

Ballard's attitude is such that we are often reminded of sf by the very things he is ostentatiously not doing. Ballard likes to regard himself as something of an outcast among the sf fraternity. He avoids most other authors, he believes - in sharp distinction to the adulation

expressed by other writers – that 'H. G. Wells has had a disastrous influence on the subsequent course of science fiction', he seems to regard William Burroughs as the greatest of sf writers, and of course he is the apostle of "Inner Space".

Making the most worthwhile contribution to the series of Guest Editorials in "New Worlds", Ballard said that he believed sf should jettison such ideas as interstellar travel, aliens, and other staple ideas of the genre, turning more towards the biological sciences than the overworked physical ones. 'The only truly alien planet is Earth'. Not only should subject matter change; style should alter. He says: 'Science fiction must jettison its present narrative forms and plots. Most of these are far too explicit to express any subtle interplay of character and theme. . . . I think most of the hard work will fall not on the writer and editor but on the readers. The onus is on them to accept a more oblique narrative style, understated themes, private symbols and vocabularies.'

This is a conscious reaction against conservative sf. Nor does Ballard, unlike most prophets, fail to practise what he preaches. His central characters, sensitive, sinful, defeated, wounded, wry, are poles away from Heinlein's swaggering heroes, Asimov's world savers, Bester's anger-propelled demons, or Wright's sour conspirators, or of all the snarlingly brave guys with blasters and cloaks and big boots that have been with us since Verne's day. Against the doers, Ballard ranges his non-doers. He is as much against galactic heroes as Bill, The Galactic Hero.

In his early stories, his non-doers were also non-runners. His central characters struggle very little against their various worlds: too little, so that we find a faint sense of anti-climax lingering about early stories like "Prima Belladonna", "Waiting Grounds", "Sound Sweep", "Zone of Terror" and "Build-Up". But at this time, Ballard had still not found his tenor, and was writing stories like "Mobile", "Escapement", and "Now: Zero", all of which are too feeble and derivative to find equivalents in his later work. (Incidentally, all the stories mentioned in this paragraph, excepting "Escapement", can be found in one of other of Ballard's first two published volumes, "The Voices of Time" and "Billenium", both put out courageously by Berkley of New York in the same year, 1962.

Yet, just as he began with such masterly stories as "Manhole 99" and "Track 12", so his non-runners still appear in his latest stories. But this is where I think Ballard's development comes in. The non-doing was at first a disadvantage because Ballard had yet to forge the 'oblique narrative style, understated themes, and private symbols' he needed. In the volume called "The Terminal Beach", he presents a series of stories in which the non-doing of the central character is essential to the structure; it has become the structure. His characters, like the characters of Julius Feiffer's cartoons, stand still and give themselves away. Apart from a certain amount of running through a forest in "The Illuminated Man", there is almost no action in the dozen stories. You could hear a finger stir.



### Characteristic Lack of Hope

This is the effect Ballard needs. He has junked the old types of sf narrative and found space for nuance and for inner space. His settings too have moved from the cities and suburbias into desert places, almost as though this gives Ballard more room for his manoeuvres. Not only is the style more oblique than formerly; the proceedings are looked at from a more oblique angle. The examination now is less of failure than of the private glories often enshrined in failure. This is a major progression in which tales like "The Subliminal Man" – where Franklin, the chief character, is torn between doing and non-doing – perhaps mark a transitional stage. The curiously named James B – in "Illuminated Man", Pelham in "The Reptile Enclosure", Charles Gifford in "The Delta at Sunset", Traven in the title story, Holliday in "Deep End", Maitland in "The Gioconda of the Twilight Noon" can all be regarded as men who are failures from a worldly point of view; but the writer convinces us that there is more of interest to them than that; rejected by or rejecting the world, they are free to discover and suffer in unfrequented ways.

Many writers have freed themselves from the sort of tyrannies Ballard has rejected; but Ballard is probably the only one to do it in sf (at least without relapsing into the formless whimsy that mars the writing of Cordwainer Smith). So one is interested to see what the sf world makes of Ballard's writing. The people one might expect to cheer have cheered: Damon Knight in America, Michael Moorcock in Britain, John Baxter in Australia. Kingsley Amis devoted a long and appreciative review to "The Drowned World" in the Observer. Fan reaction has naturally been mixed; most of them do not understand and do not want to. But Peter White, a young man who shows promise as a critic, printed an interesting analysis of "Terminal Beach" in "Vector". Even the fans and editors must be let off lightly; at the least they read and tolerate Ballard and provide a market for his pot-boilers like "The Wind from Nowhere". As Ballard himself has said, 'As with most specialised media (sf) needs a faithful and discriminating audience'. We must all be grateful that the audience is at least faithful.

Moorcock claimed in a fanzine, "Les Spinge", that William Burroughs is 'the only sf writer (with the exception of Ballard) worth reading'. Whether Burroughs is an sf writer is open to debate. Perhaps he seems important in a dislocated world because his theme is dislocation. Ballard's techniques are much more conservative than Burroughs's. Indeed, only in a conservative little corner of writing like sf could he ever be suspected of being revolutionary. He relies, as do the rest of us, on the logical effect of a cumulative progression of detail, so that his stories reach a climacteric point arrived at from the qualities inherent in the start of the account; and he attempts to 'write well' as, say, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch would have defined the term. He enjoys encrusting his sentences with adjectives and rare words until, like the transformations in "The Illuminated Man", they hand in 'huge pieces of opalescent candy, whose countless reflections

glowed like giant chimeras in the cut-glass walls'. I'm not sure that Sir Arthur in his more Platonic moods would have approved of all that.

It may have been this encrustation process that led Amis to speak of Ballard's power as being 'reminiscent of Conrad'. More deeply, Amis sees that "Drowned World's" 'main action is in the deeper reaches of the mind, the main merit (is) 'the extraordinary imaginative power with which whatever inhabits these reaches is externalised in concrete form'. Conrad's men of action are not Ballard's; he traffics with the sedentary encapsulated men of our proto-space age. He seems to see in us a sickness that corresponds with something in nature. Nature, in Ballard's works, produces some considerable horrors – horrors which the older type of sf writer such as Williamson or Wyndham would have been glad to devise for the sake of a rattling adventure through ruined America or England – but the vital point Ballard seems to make is that man, being sick, conspires with these horrors, so that he does not feel their full effect. Ransome in "The Drought", like the long line of suffering central figures before him, would never think of complaining of the decay of all earthly hopes – largely because (so one diagnoses from his prototypes in earlier stories) he has never had any earthly hopes.

Similarly, Kerans in "The Drowned World" is unmoved by the chaos about him, even when this takes the nastiest forms. 'He remembered again one ghastly cemetery over which they had moved, its Florentine tombs cracked and sprung, corpses floating out in their unravelling winding sheets in a grim rehearsal of the Day of Judgement.' The mood seems to be one of grim humour; Kerans gives no indication of discomfort.

In the same way, James B- wishes to return to the swamps of Florida in "The Illuminated Man". Here perhaps the identification of hero and author is over strong, for James B- is made to feel too clearly for conviction the pleasure that Ballard evidently gets from his prismatic effects.

This direct identification is given away in a sentence like 'For some reason I suddenly felt less concerned to find a co-called 'scientific' explanation for the strange phenomenon we had seen'. Which brings us to another point that must be considered when examining Ballard's work in relation to science fiction in general, his hostility to science and technology, which is linked with his indifference to providing us with a scientific explanation. In his contempt for 'a so-called 'scientific' explanation', he often neglects even a logical one. This shows up most badly, as one would expect, in the writings nearest to traditional sf in flavour – notably "The Wind from Nowhere": inauspiciously titled, for the wind indeed comes from nowhere and appears to go nowhere, and dies as it rises without reasons given.

### **Wrecking the Space Stations**

It is at this point that Ballard most resembles Ray Bradbury, whose writings he admires, although the ambiguity of his feelings even towards science makes him the more interesting writer. His refuge from life in

a scientific age is Bradbury's refuge, a seeking for the childhood world of feeling without thought.

Children are absent from Ballard's stories, sometimes obtrusively (two of the central characters in "The Terminal Beach" collection have lost wives and young children in car smashes), but many characters have the childlike trait that they will brave danger to return to the time/place where they feel most intensely. (Their boldness is generally rewarded, for few of them come to grief, even when surrounded with the most inauspicious circumstances). Kerans is a notable example of this, and Ransome, who is a pallid copy of Kerans, as "The Drought" is a pallid copy of "The Drowned World". Kerans loses his identity; in the last lines of the novel, he is reduced to the anonymity of 'a second Adam'; Ransome merely loses his shadow. Maitland, in "The Giocconda of the Twilight Noon", tears out his eyes to attain the child's vision.

Perhaps here we have the reason why Ballard, like Bradbury, has become a figure of controversy. Whether his turning away from the striding he-man of sf is an intellectual or an instinctive act (and one must suppose that by its power in Ballard's work it is the latter, aided by intellectual window-dressing), it does not go down smoothly with the addict reader, who wants big tough figures he can identify with.

The shifting ambiguities of *Vermilion Sands* and all the other dune-ridden landscapes are too perplexing for them.

Ballard is a sensitive writer, and it is hard sometimes not to feel that his stories are written in a perverse spirit. This, of course, is one way to survive the criticism of the ignorant. After the first spate of ill-judged criticisms, Ballard's stories seemed to contain more wrecked space vehicles lying in the sand, more derelict ones orbiting overhead, more modern gadgets going wrong, more motels and hotels sinking in water or dust, more launching ramps and gantries rusting away. In some of the stories in "Terminal Beach", you can almost hear him say "That's one for Arthur Clarke!"

One of his most notable bits of machine-wrecking occurs towards the end of "The Drought", where Ballard reveals himself as the literary luddite par excellence. He describes a small pavilion, 'its glass and metal cornices shining in the sunlight. It had been constructed from assorted pieces of chromium and enamelled metal - the radiator grills of cars, reflectors of electric heaters, radio cabinets and so on - fitted together with remarkable ingenuity'.

This is collage again, and another example of the unifying process at work. It is in part Ballard's way of commenting on the meaninglessness of the original gadgets; although they have been perverted from their intended usages, they now make something more worth while on a sane scale of values, 'a Faberge gem'. Analogously, this is what Ballard has done with the materialist values of the average sf tale. He finds most of the usual trappings not worthwhile. His editorial on Inner Space was impatient about 'the narrow imaginative limits imposed by the background of rocket ships and planet-hopping', and he is accustomed to refer to fictional space travels as old hat.

Personally, I disagree with much of this, I cannot see how his constant wrecking of the biosphere is to be reckoned as newer than space travel; nor do I think that symbols such as rockets and robots, which have been created as it were by agreement over several decades, should be lightly scrapped. But one welcomes the fact that Ballard has a point of view; it is the only way to create original work; the failure of the other writers dealt with in this article is precisely there. They are copying, Ballard is originating.

It is a pity, then, that in "The Drought" he seems momentarily to be copying himself. It may be that there is a fallacy in his inner space thesis. If, as I have suggested, his manifesto was conceived to justify his work (and we all need justification), it might be that in times of lower creative pressure, he would fall back on it consciously; on such occasions, the fallacy would be more likely to show through. Ballard's characters are forced to inhabit inner space by their failure to communicate, sometimes to communicate even on an elementary level. Several of his protagonists could be saved or could save themselves just by speaking out. A case in point is Maitland in "The Gioconda of the Twilight Noon". We can see no reason why he should not have spoken to the doctor concerning his blindness. Is it convention that keeps him silent, or the conventions of a Ballard story? The same question might be asked of Gifford in "The Delta at Sunset"; the last we see of him, he is refusing to answer his wife, his one contact with reality.

### **The Dislocated World**

This dislocation with the outer world continues even when the outer world is itself dislocated. It reaches maximum severance in passages of "The Drought".

Ransome goes to some trouble to drive into Mount Royal to see Catherine Austen, who is working in a zoo. She pretends he is the vet at first, then says, "I'm glad to see you, doctor. Have you come to help?"

"In a sense," says Ransome. The answer seems to satisfy her, and she tells him how she will look after the animals.

"And then?", he asks.

"What are you trying to say, doctor?" is her reply. After more desultory talk, she asks him, "Why don't you join me, doctor? We'll teach the lions to hunt in packs."

Ransome's answer is to pick up his valise and walk away.

The fashion today is for oblique and ambiguous conversation; Pinter has many imitators, and one or two of them might be more interesting in science fiction than the Hemingway imitators. Ballard is as fascinated by futility as Pinter or N. F. Simpson; but this sample of conversation, not untypical of many others, reveals him failing to make a point, perhaps because he is caught juggling different conventions – the situation on the surface is too like a scene from "Day of the Triffids", with good old Bill driving into the ruined town to do a bit of shopping, for us willingly to accept anything like metaphysical

ambiguity. Ballard is a surprising man; it may be that this is a new direction – it's needed! – towards which he alone is moving, and that "The Drought" represents a transitional point.

He probably regards all of literature as a transitional point, if we may paraphrase one of his own dicta. One direction in which he has moved is deeper into natural landscapes and away from man-made ones. The enveloping cities of "Billenium", "Chronopolis", "The Subliminal Man" (which contains the most brilliant obsolescence-speeding gadgets anyone has dreamed up) and a dozen more stories, are left behind.

One may regret this. At times, subtopia seemed almost like a patent Ballard invention. With his fondness for collages, Ballard should occupy a fallow period by mounting a metropolis novel from shuffled sections of his city stories. It might make his most striking novel yet.

Whichever way he is going, Ballard is still careful to maintain his books within a science fiction framework, even when this hardly seems necessary. The explanation of the drought in "The Drought", which appears in Chapter 6, is a traditional one, served in the traditional way, isolated so that an uninterested reader can skip that bit, a shuffling of the customary phrases, 'world-wide attempts at cloud-seeding', 'off-shore waters of the world's oceans', 'thin but resilient mono-molecular film from a complex of saturated long-chain polymers . . .' anyone who has composed any catastrophe story has dealt in this knowledgeable and inoffensive journalistic language. Ballard does the job as efficiently as anyone – better, indeed, than some, for the immediate follow-up of this last quote about the long-chain polymers is a mention of 'vast quantities of industrial wastes discharged into the ocean basins', which thus with a nudge of guilt (over-consumption and biosphere pollution) takes our attention away from any doubts about the science.

Despite his care to keep within the science fiction framework, Ballard is often careless with his facts. Or perhaps it is more accurate to say that he is rather lordly about his material, just as he is about his readers. At the beginning of "The Drowned World", the identity of the submerged city is left vague: 'had it once been Berlin, Paris or London?', Kerans asked himself. Ballard seems to put his own thoughts into Kerans' head when he says, a few pages later, 'despite the potent magic of the lagoon worlds and the drowned cities, he had never felt any interest in their contents, and never bothered to identify in which of the cities he was stationed'. But you'd think someone would know; the navigator, perhaps.

Later, the city turns out to be London, and Leicester Square is drained of water. Here it is the brute facts of hydrodynamics which are dealt with in a lordly way. It is hard to see how a dam of ships could keep the water out, even when we are told that the lagoon was sealed off by 'fungi growing in the swamp mud outside (which) consolidated the entire mass'.

These inaccuracies are not too troublesome in themselves; but Ballard's attitude to inconsistency is less comfortable. I find them easy to forgive when, to hark back to the last example, we are offered as a result of the draining of Leicester Square, such amusing novelties as

the bats 'darting from one dripping eave to another', and the scow which 'ran aground on the sidewalk, pushed off again and then stuck finally on a traffic island'. This is how I like my science fiction, with the world topsy-turvy, and something unlikely on every page following from the original premise.

Jim Ballard, in private conversation, enjoys giving the impression that science fiction has little to offer him and that it is a form of cheating, of 'unearned experience'. I have argued that on the contrary it is often a record of psychic experience. Ballard's writing itself seems to support this proposition, even if Ballard won't. Unlike the other writers dealt with here, he uses sf to a fresh end, but it is hard to see what other field of writing would suit his gift for conjuring up vivid and alien landscapes and describing strange and disconnected states of mind.

His witty and nervous worlds, littered with twitching nerves and crashed space stations, carry their own conviction that will eventually win him popular support. For his characters, the worst blow is always over, they are past their nemesis and consequently free. One can only hope that for Ballard too the worst misunderstanding is over, so that he will be free to create in a more intelligent atmosphere. Despite some shortcomings, his stories represent one of the few stimulating forces in contemporary sf.

## Conclusion

Of course no conclusion is possible. The three writers I have chosen have little in common. Two of them were overdue for a little attention, the third presents, or seems to me to present several facets that have not so far been examined. Although Malcolm, being young, may yet re-think his approach to writing and produce something more vital than his past work, Ballard seems to offer most for the future, particularly if he can find his way out of a rather restrictive attitude towards what is permissible as content in science fiction.

Ballard is manifestly the soundest critic of the three. Self-criticism is a valuable, and under-valued, part of fiction writing. It saves one trickling too much nonsense into print. The harshness of Lan Wright does not persuade or convince in view of his indulgence towards his own writing.

With the death of "New Worlds" and "Science Fantasy", and their rebirth as Roberts and Vinter/Compact magazines, these writers, and all the other British writers for which they have been forced to stand in this article, are faced with a challenge. The change of ownership of "Amazing" and "Fantastic" in the U.S. may betoken a similar crisis there. Ballard has obviously been lucky. Moorcock, editing "New Worlds", has long been his faithful and discerning supporter. For Wright and Malcolm, and many of the old Nova company such as Francis Rayer, E. R. James, and Kenneth Bulmer, the change-over may not be so easy. They may even have to follow the hard path not advocated by Wright and acquire general appeal, not to mention 'adapting their styles'.

Ballard's advice, unpalatable though it may seem, is capable of being followed: 'Science fiction must jettison its present narrative forms and plots. Most of these are far too explicit to express any subtle interplay of character and theme.' Only in what follows does Ballard go adrift, when he says that most of the hard work will fall not on the writer and editor but on the readers. The readers, after all, are there only incidentally; they will come if the work is good enough. The labour has to be done by the writers.

Ballard offers most of us a fair example of one way in which it may be done.

My guess is that first you need a message – "something to say".

### **Lan Wright**

- |                         |                           |
|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| Who Speaks of Conquest? | New Worlds, Nos. 46–49.   |
| And Earthly Power . . . | New Worlds, No. 55.       |
| A Man Called Destiny    | New Worlds, Nos. 78–80.   |
| Guest Editorial         | New Worlds, No. 125.      |
| Dawn's Left Hand        | New Worlds, Nos. 126–128. |
| Space Born              | Herbert Jenkins, 1964.    |

### **Donald Malcolm**

- |                            |                                |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Lone Voyager               | Nebula, No. 30.                |
| Twice Bitten               | New Worlds, No. 127.           |
| Guest Editorial            | New Worlds, No. 128.           |
| Beyond the Reach of Storms | New Worlds, No. 141.           |
| Beyond the Reach of Storms | Lambda I, Penguin Books, 1965. |

### **J. G. Ballard**

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| The Voice of Time                           | Berkley, 1962.       |
| The Wind from Nowhere                       | Berkley, 1961.       |
| Billionium                                  | Berkley, 1962.       |
| The Drowned World                           | Gollancz, 1962.      |
| Guest Editorial                             | New Worlds, No. 118. |
| The 4-Dimensional Nightmare                 | Gollancz, 1963.      |
| The Subliminal Man                          | New Worlds, No. 126. |
| The Terminal Beach                          | Gollancz, 1964.      |
| Ballard's Terminal Beach,<br>by Peter White | Vector, No. 31.      |
| The Drought                                 | Jonathan Cape, 1965. |

*S.F. : The Critical Literature**Part One*

It is the authors who give substance, shape and self-consciousness to a literary movement, but it is the critics who define and map it, often give it direction, and sometimes (the proposition is moot) refine it. Together with the bibliographers, the critics also serve to bring the movement to the attention of librarians, a function which is almost never mentioned but is of considerable importance; these three workmen of letters are its conservators and custodians.

As Aldiss and Harrison have pointed out,\* it was once widely assumed that science fiction was too tender a plant to be safely subjected to literary criticism. A representative opinion was that voiced by H. L. Gold, who barred critical book reviews from "Galaxy" because he feared that they would scare away authors, particularly new ones. (Gold himself was one of the two most combative editors and editorialists the field has ever seen.)

As Messrs Aldiss and Harrison also note, if there ever was any merit in this notion - which is unlikely - it is thoroughly obsolete now. The man who administered the coup de grace to it was Damon Knight, who in 1950 began to publish a series of reviews of science fiction books so uncompromising in tone, and so well grounded in literary experience and taste, as to raise howls about scrub-brushery among the unwashed. (Actually, as Anthony Boucher later observed, Knight's criticism is as notable for its informed appreciation of good work as it is for its savagery toward the slovenly.)

I have discussed Knight's critical work before,† but it is difficult to do justice to it except at length and on its own terms. A fair and extensive sample of it - about half the total output, I believe - may be found in his book, "In Search of Wonder"?. This volume, after a brief but epee-like statement of principles, groups the Knight book reviews by authors and other victims (including editors, anthologies, and a marvelous category called "Chuckleheads"). It is astonishing to see how consistently these assemblages of occasional pieces work out; logic is one of Knight's most attractive traits, buttressed throughout by honesty and wit. The chapters are not rag-bags; instead, they constitute studies of most of the major modern sf writers, plus a few long, cold looks at the kind of creaking machine which customarily passes for a classic in this genre.

The part of this essay dealing with "New Maps of Hell" is based on material previously published in *Xero*, © 1960 by Richard S. Lüpoff, and is reprinted with Mr. Lüpoff's kind permission.

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\* Editorial, SF HORIZONS, No. 1.

† THE ISSUE AT HAND, Ch. 2<sup>a</sup>.



"In Search of Wonder" is a useful book for both scholar and practitioner, but its virtues do not end there. In addition, it is so frequently funny, and the engaging personality of its author so unreservedly informs every page of it, that it might well delight readers who have never encountered a line by any of the writers Knight examines. These are much the same qualities which make George Bernard Shaw's music criticism rewarding even for readers with tin ears.

In view of the fact that "In Search of Wonder" is a pioneer work, it is also amazing to see how nearly flawless a performance it is, even this many years after Knight embarked upon the studies it synthesizes. The few cavils I still feel justified in offering are almost embarrassingly minor. For instance, Knight occasionally lets his love of sf lead him into confusing large ambitions with dwarf performances, resulting in punchy chapter titles which abuse words like "cosmic", "Parnassus" and "genius" which may please sf fans - who are addicted to hyperbole of this kind - but are not reassuring usages in a critic's hands. There are also some traces of Knight's evolution as a critic, visible in an early tendency to summarize plots in great detail; but these disappear rapidly, nor are they always indefensible - his plot summary of Stanley Mullen's "Kinsman of the Dragon" for instance, is perfectly suitable to the preposterousness of its (er, ahem) content, and I can fault it only because I think Knight could have exploded this assemblage of idiocies in less than half the space he devoted to it. (All the same, the review of the Mullen is so funny throughout that I am glad I was never asked where I would cut it). In any event, Knight saw almost immediately that plot summaries are usually imprecise and always clumsy weapons; as the book proceeds, his hand becomes steadily firmer and his instruments sharper. The performance as a whole is outright elegant.

Historically, Knight's criticisms promptly made the mutual-admiration-society or notice-of-availability kind of review look fatuous, and encouraged several other practitioners toward greater severity: in particular, Lester del Rey, Frederik Pohl, Larry Shaw, and even George O. Smith. Some sf reviewers today continue to dispense an almost exclusive diet of stars and kisses, but it is no longer possible to pretend that they do it because they must.

My own criticism, as Atheling, of magazine stories - later expanded to include books<sup>3</sup> - was begun in 1952. Though it is considerably indebted to such traditional critics as R. P. Blackmur and Ezra Pound, as one would expect of a writer with a background in such literary quarterlies as *Sewanee Review*, it was most heavily influenced by Knight, with whom I shared schooling in the same literary agency and elsewhere. We had often discussed technical matters, had collaborated on five sf stories and part of a novel, and in 1957, with Judith Merrill, founded the Milford (Pennsylvania) Science Fiction Writer's Conference, which Knight has been running with great success ever since, so it is not surprising that we should have many assumptions and preferences in common.

What is surprising is that, with Knight's book and my own, there should still be only five existing volumes of criticism of modern sf, even if one counts a book (discussed below) which is primarily historical in intent and utterly naive in what little criticism it does attempt. (I rule out of consideration a hardbound pamphlet by Basil Davenport which, although graceful and charming, bears about the same relation to sf criticism as books on "music appreciation" do to the studies of Sir Donald Francis Tovey). Until lately, under the intellectual pressure exerted by Knight, close and honest criticism simply has not been welcome in this universe of discourse.

Books useful in other ways to the sf writer and student do exist, some of them of considerable interest and including marginal but rewarding critical observations. The earliest of these which still remains worth exploring is a 1947 symposium for beginning writers, "Of Worlds Beyond", edited by Lloyd Arthur Eshbach<sup>4</sup>. It contains brief essays (the entire volume, including blank pages and the index, biographical notes and other apparatus, is 104 pages long) by seven long-established writers; their how-to-do-it flavour is well conveyed by their titles. They are: "On the Writing of Speculative Fiction", by Robert A. Heinlein; "Writing a Science Fiction Novel", by "John Taine" (Eric Temple Bell); "The Logic of Fantasy", by Jack Williamson; "Complication in the Science Fiction Story", by A. E. van Vogt; "Humor in Science Fiction", by L. Sprague de Camp; "The Epic of Space", by Edward E. Smith, Ph.D.; and "The Science of Science Fiction Writing", by John W. Campbell, Jr.

Of these, the best is the Heinlein - a real marvel of compression, every line of which contains good advice for the new writer, but not critical, nor intended to be, except for several buried assumptions about the nature of the idiom itself which Heinlein shares with most other major sf writers (and some of which he helped to form). (For example, the necessity for honesty toward scientific matters currently accepted as fact.) The van Vogt essay is almost as precise in its recommendations, but because it describes its author's peculiar system of constructing a story by introducing a new idea or plot twist every 800 words (I solemnly swear that I am not making this up), would be impossible for most beginners to use, and probably pernicious for those few capable of following its advice, van Vogt often included; in any event, what fragmentary criticism is findable in it is all implicit. Taine's piece is solemnly funny about scientific accuracy and how to achieve it; de Camp despite considerable urbanity is no more successful at explaining how to write a funny story than anyone else has ever been; and the other three essays are of no interest now and probably never were except to the most determined minor of low-grade ore).

A similar but much more detailed and practical volume is de Camp's "Science Fiction Handbook"<sup>5</sup>. As is the case with most market letters, parts of this book dated very rapidly, but a high proportion of its advice is still good, and much of it would be sound for any beginning writer regardless of his field of specialization. Four chapters of the book's twelve are of critical interest: the first three - about 90 pages -

which comprise the best history of the field I have seen; and Chapter Six, which consists of capsule accounts of the careers of eighteen sf writers – Isaac Asimov, Leigh Brackett, Ray Bradbury, Edmond Hamilton, Robert A. Heinlein, Will F. Jenkins (“Murray Leinster”), Henry Kuttner, Fritz Leiber, Frank Belknap Long, C. L. Moore, Eric Frank Russell, Clifford D. Simak, E. E. Smith, Ph.D.\*, George O. Smith, Theodore Sturgeon, A. E. van Vogt, Robert Moore Williams and Jack Williamson. These were probably, as de Camp believes, the most successful sf writers of the period 1926-1950 (to which list one would have to add de Camp himself). The sketches are primarily biographical, but de Camp also strikes off the characteristic preoccupations of each writer incisively, sometimes in a few paragraphs, sometimes in only a sentence or two. (All of these writers except Kuttner, who died in 1958, are still active, although Long, Moore and Williamson have appeared infrequently in the past decade, and de Camp, always fundamentally a scholar, has turned to the historical novel.) The “Handbook” is extensively annotated, and includes a fine bibliography – in fact, it includes seven.

I shall mention briefly here Alva Rogers’ “A Requiem For Astounding”<sup>8</sup>, not because it has any virtues as criticism – Mr. Rogers specifically disavows any such intent – but because it is typical of the kind of book sf fans mistake for criticism, or prefer to read instead of criticism. It is a long and loving history of the magazine’s first thirty years, embellished with many covers and interior illustrations from ASF. The text consists chiefly of tables of contents of the magazine, almost issue by issue, plus plot summaries of the stories Mr. Rogers considers most important. The writing itself is enthusiastic, nostalgic and clumsy. Volumes of this kind make up fully three quarters of the existing literature about sf. Some, like Donald B. Day’s “Index to the Science Fiction Magazines, 1926-1950”<sup>7</sup>, are of obvious bibliographical importance; others, like Mr. Rogers’, would be of interest only to the most rabid enthusiast. The most astonishing of these “inside” volumes is Sam Moskowitz’ “The Immortal Storm”, a history of the publications and internal politics of a small segment of sf fandom, centered upon Mr. Moskowitz himself and written in what appears to be Middle High Neolithic.

Moskowitz is also responsible, however, for one of sf’s five authentic books of criticism, “Explorers of the Infinite”<sup>8</sup>. (It will be observed that Mr. Moskowitz, like many of his fellow enthusiasts, has a weakness for grandiose titles.) It is a series of biographical sketches of a number of pioneer writers of sf, ending with Stanley G. Weinbaum (d. 1936), including summaries of their publishing histories and estimates of their influence.

It is this last word which is most important. Though Moskowitz

\* Should the new reader wonder whether any other writers of science fiction have doctorates, the answer is that several do. “Doc” Smith, however, began his career in the days when editors liked to parade any academic distinctions their authors had attained. The custom didn’t last, but Smith did. His degree now serves only to distinguish his by-line from that of another E. (for Evelyn) E. Smith.

is the nearest thing to a scholar that sf has yet produced, his research – as P. Schuyler Miller and others have pointed out – is not always trustworthy; and in the past he has shown an irritating tendency to wax polemical in defence of his errors, in preference to correcting them. Hence, even his most interesting historical and bibliographical discoveries, of which are a respectable number, are clouded by questions about the primacy of his sources (his account of Cyrano de Bergerac's "Voyage dans la Lune" 1650, for instance, is the work of a man who does not read French), and of whether or not he has really got the facts straight (as he has failed to do in parts of his discussions of Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. G. Wells, neither of them writers whose careers could reasonably be called obscure).

But Moskowitz has chosen his writers in the first place because he believes them to have played important roles in the formation of important traditions, attitudes and assumptions in sf, and it is here that his chief pretensions as a critic are to be found. Now as anyone who has read much criticism of any kind knows, influence-detecting, though it is one of the commonest of parlor games, is also a very tricky business; it demands common sense, wide reading, a keen ear for language, and enough scholarship to determine whether or not Author B (the influencee) ever in fact read any of Author A (the putative influence) and, if he did, what he thought of the experience. Moskowitz is not well equipped in three of these departments, and quite hopeless in the fourth (language).

Let us start with common sense. Though the de Bergerac is often cited in historical summaries (for instance, by de Camp) as one of the earliest of all interplanetary romances, I know of only two sf writers who have read it; one of these is de Camp himself, and the other is Willy Ley, whose contributions to the field include only a few stories. (In one sense, noted above, it would fairly be said that Moskowitz hasn't read it, either.) Hence as a specimen of the primitive interplanetary journey it can be regarded only as a curiosity, neither more or less influential than such other unread samples as Kepler's "Somnium" – or, for that matter, Voltaire's "Micromegas". In this light it is especially illuminating to find that Moskowitz completely ignores the late 19th Century utopian novelists; as Miller pointed out in his review, Bellamy's "Looking Backward" and Butler's "Erewhon", essential to the understanding of Well's development as to that of many a lesser writer, do not even make Moskowitz's index.

This far from trifling omission may be a failure in the second category, reading. Though Moskowitz may have read more sf and fantasy than any other living man – I for one am just as happy to be unable to compete for such a laurel – his knowledge of the rest of literature seems to be a vast blank, flecked here and there by works he has read because their titles mislead him into assuming that they were fantasies. As one would expect, this means also that he is unfamiliar with most of the seminal myths of western culture, which are so fundamental to even the simple enjoyment of fantasy as to make one wonder what on earth Moskowitz sees in the stuff.

As for an ear for language, Moskowitz has none; a more crucial deficiency for a critic could hardly be imagined. His own style is deadly – pompous, pedantic, humourless and graceless. Some firm editorial hand seems to have removed from this book the solecisms and ghastly grammatical bollixes which are the hallmarks of Moskowitz pure – thus depriving the reader even of a source of unconscious humour – but it remains nevertheless something of a chore simply to get through. As is more evident in his later work – magazine articles on more recent writers – than in this volume, this insensitivity makes it impossible for Moskowitz to detect any sort of influence but that of subject-matter or theme, and that kind of detection is seldom better than guesswork. (For example, he has cited my own "There Shall Be No Darkness" as a direct descendant of Jack Williamson's "Darker Than You Think"; he had no way of knowing – except by asking me – that my story, although first published in 1950, had been written ten years earlier, about eight months before the Williamson was published; but a critic with an ear would have recognized that my story is a schoolboy pastiche of "Dracula", while the Williamson has quite different ancestors and is at the same time much more original.) A more fundamental objection, however, is voiced with characteristic kindness by Miller:

"It seems to me, too, that the author sees far more imitation – or is it more polite to say 'derivative writing?' – than is fair or just. This may be a matter of experience. Sam Moskowitz is more of a collector/reader and editor than a writer of sf. It is commonplace that when the time is ripe, half a dozen writers may start work simultaneously on stories with the same theme or 'gimick'. At a time when Lowell was lecturing and writing on his belief in an inhabited Mars, it would be practically impossible for adventure novelists not to pick up the hint and set their heroes on the road to the red planet."

Or, more bluntly, this book about the influences which have helped to shape a literature of ideas ignores the effect of climates of opinion.

The fourth of the five critical books we are considering here (the other three being the Atheling, the Knight and the Moskowitz) is less than half the size of "Explorers Of The Infinite" and somewhat more limited in its ambitions, but a great deal more successful on virtually every count. This is "The Science Fiction Novel"<sup>7</sup>, which comprises the texts of four University of Chicago guest lectures on sf as social criticism. The authors are Alfred Bester, Robert Bloch, Robert A. Heinlein and Cyril Kornbluth, and there is an introduction by Basil Davenport.

It is ordinary enough for the contributions to a symposium to be of uneven merit, but these four essays are uneven in peculiar ways. The poorest is by Alfred Bester, the author of the Huge-winning "The Demolished Man" and probably the most brilliant (indeed, flamboyant) technician ever to write sf. The only idea of substance – and it is pretty wispy – Bester has to offer is a hypothesis that novels achieve popularity and influence primarily as media for the personality of the author. Hence he would have it that his (Bester's) own recent

work is better than his rather mechanical pre-World War II fiction because he has in the interim become a nicer fellow.\* Nobody who knows him will deny that Alfie Bester is one of the nicest chaps ever to touch ground while walking, but as criticism this essay is a vast disappointment. The hypothesis of course leaves no room for social criticism.

C. M. Kornbluth, a superb writer but one much of whose adult career was so submerged in his collaboration with Frederik Pohl that Kingsley Amis (see below) professes to find him invisible, reaches a roughly similar conclusion but upon quite different grounds. Pointing out that such novels as "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and "The Good Soldier Schweik" have catalyzed revolutions, he goes on to the assumption – which at the least would be difficult to disprove – that modern sf has had no social effect, and then undertakes to ask why. The question was of special interest to him, since the most famous Pohl/Kornbluth novel, "The Space Merchants", was a virulent attack upon the institution of advertising which was widely read and reviewed by advertising men and many other people not usually exposed to sf, is still in print – it has been published in at least one new country every year since it first appeared – and yet quite obviously failed to shake Madison Avenue more than marginally and momentarily. Kornbluth's approach is an examination of this book and a few of its contemporaries, plus such precursors and peers of the socially ambitious sf novel as "Gulliver's Travels" and Orwell's "1984", using the instruments of *explication du texte* pioneered in the mainstream by the New Criticism. His conclusion – that modern sf goes away from reality, not toward it, and hence is in itself a wish-fulfillment device which does not require the reader to take action in society – is certainly not final, but equally he does not arrive at it out of nowhere.

Robert Bloch's essay is startlingly more interesting than the Bester – startling, because Bloch's own voluminous output of fiction is largely so superficial that he has exerted no visible influence upon any other writer (and at the time of composition of the essay, had not written a sf novel); nor had he been suspected of much critical acumen. The body of the essay is an acid indictment of modern sf for its perpetuation of social clichés, especially those of the liberal class. He cites nine major ones, and they make uncomfortable reading. It is Bloch's central thesis that although sf mostly does not criticize contemporary society, it should do so; he maintains that the most desirable function of the genre is to shake the reader's assumptions until their teeth rattle. (Amis was later to arrive independently at a similar conclusion.) In Bloch's eyes, therefore, almost the whole corpus of modern sf as a spectacle of authors neglecting their duty as social

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\* In a later essay for an anthology which was to contain the favorite short story of each author represented (Robert P. Mills, ed.: "Worlds of Science Fiction"), Bester instead contributed an explanation of why he no longer much cared for anything he had written. It is of course an author's privilege to be diffident, but it is a privilege seldom abused.

critics. Oddly, he winds up denying this conclusion – or, more specifically, calling the failure he has outlined a criticism of the readers, not the writers – but the point remains, and it pierces.

Heinlein's essay is now moderately well known as the vehicle for his definition of sf as a branch of realistic fiction, "much more realistic than is most historical and contemporary-scene fiction and . . . superior to them both". This belief is highly idiosyncratic, to say the least, and requires more defense than Heinlein gives it; in the essay, it must simply be accepted as a statement of belief. Most of the essay is designed to show sf's merits as technological prophecy, a field in which Heinlein has been the most successful writer since H. G. Wells, and to document its actual social effects as a spur to real invention. Like Bloch, Heinlein perversely proceeds to deny the point he has just made, but he returns to it promptly in the interests of an even larger, related social claim: that sf serves to prepare young people for the technological changes among which they will have to live.

All five of the pieces in the book are well written (though Bloch's style is irritatingly flip), and as a whole the volume is a landmark.

Finally, we have "New Maps Of Hell", by Kingsley Amis. This volume is the only existing serious study of sf of any weight to have been undertaken by an outsider – that is, by a man who has himself written little or no sf (none at that time). It differs from the de Camp, the Knight, the Atheling and the Advent collection in addressing itself primary to the reader – particularly the prospective reader – rather than the practitioner.

Amis has admitted in person that he knew less about sf than he should have when this book was begun, but he is not the complete outsider that some of his reviewers have implied. He has been reading sf since about 1934, and his text refers to magazine stories which appeared well before that year (plus, of course, works of Wells and others which were published before he was born). He was for some time a member of the three-man board of selection of the British Science Fiction Book Club (an organization with a considerably better record than its American counterpart, which is a captive creature of Doubleday) and has been the regular sf reviewer, since "New Maps" appeared for the *Sunday Observer* of London. It is perhaps also indicative that his book is dedicated to Bruce Montgomery, widely unrecognised in the U.S. under this, his real name (nom-de-plume: Edmund Crispin), as Britain's leading sf anthologist.

Many of the comments I have seen on the book, however, praise or damn it for quite irrelevant reasons, as well as some that are simply invalid. There has been, for instance, a tendency to laud the book for having wrung from *Time* Magazine the first faintly friendly notice ever accorded sf as a field by that ill-written and dishonest journal. Why the friendship of *Time* should be considered valuable is beyond me, but in any case it has nothing to do with the merits of the book, which *Time's* review was incapable of assessing. Writers who are praised by Amis praise him back, in one instance to the point of endorsing a guess of his which is patently untrue; those he damns

(or worse, simply ignores) respond with steam-whistle screams. (Hell hath no fury like a woman who can't even find her name in the index.) This is understandable, but again, irrelevant.

The book has many strengths, not at the least of which is its wit – as was to have been expected from the author of "Lucky Jim" and "One Fat Englishman". It is anything but "considerably" arrogant, as its most arrogant critic unluckily alleges; indeed, Amis has no use either for intellectual slummers or for people who see sf as the greatest of art-forms, and is at pains to dissociate himself from both types. Furthermore, as noted above, he is aware of the existence of gaps in his knowledge, if not always of their extent, and admits them readily. No more can I see why opinions which have been in formation over a period of 26 years should be labelled "ill-considered;" the book is in fact extremely reflective in cast, no matter how many of its conclusions one may disagree with.

The same critic alleges "unconsidering slovenliness of research", which is nonsense, and leads me to the suspicion that the three accusations involved are not so much the product of critical judgement as of the game being played with the verb "to consider". There are, to be sure, some errors, and some omissions, but they are quite minor. On page 46, for instance, Amis is unable to remember the title or author of Hal K. Wells' 1933 story, "The Cavern of the Shining Ones", hardly a crucial lapse; and he spoils Sprague de Camp's anecdote at the top of page 60 by making its protagonist a sf writer instead of a *Weird Tales* writer, thereby missing an interesting but altogether minor psychiatric point (horror stories often have a strong sexual appeal; sf, almost none, as Amis himself later notes). In general, it is quite plain that Amis has read far more sf than most of his critics. He is also immensely better read in traditional fiction, which gives him a great advantage over people with only one string to their bows, but not, it must be added, an unfair one. For documentation see the index, which by the way is excellent.\*

The book has also been criticized – for once, relevantly – for its marked bias toward the *Galaxy* type of story. This is in part a product of the author's personal taste, about which nothing can be done; but in part, too, many of those doing the complaining have only themselves to blame. In the course of preparing the lectures at Princetown which resulted in the book, Amis sent extended questionnaires to many writers and editors in the field; and report has it that the returns came largely from the Pohl-Gold/Ballantine axis, thereby heavily skewing the data for which Amis was searching.

This is nevertheless a real weakness, however it came about. What seems to appeal most to Amis in sf is social satire, so much so that he readily swallows a great deal of work ranging from the pathetically inept to the downright awful. It is this bias that leads him to his now notorious delication of Frederik Pohl (and perhaps to his weird

\* The Ballantine paperback edition of the book has a curtailed index, but pays for this in part by adding a feature of great value: a list of all the stories and novels mentioned by Amis which were then available in paperback editions.



parallel assumption that in the Pohl-Kornbluth collaborations, Pohl did the thinking and Kornbluth stuck in the action), which I suspect is already an embarrassment to both men and is likely to become more so as time goes on. Of greater consequence than overestimating an individual writer, however – for on such a matter there is often no possibility of honest agreement between one critic and another – is the encouragement this bias lends to further proliferation of social satire in sf, a sub-class which had reduced itself to a cliché and a bore some time before Amis came on the scene to give it his endorsement. I at least would maintain that rather than calling for better examples of the type, as Amis does, what we should ask for is moratorium of the damn thing. It has already been done very well, middling well, not well at all, and absolutely miserably, *ad nauseam*; and its subsidiary, in which sf satires itself, has become a positive blight on the landscape.

Personal taste, skewed data or both also bias the book toward the one-punch type of story, of which the work of Robert Sheckley is properly singled out as the best example. The bias, unlike the previous one, is surprising in a sophisticated sf reader, simply because such a reader is almost impossible to surprise. It is characteristic of a Sheckley story, as it is of the work of less polished writers of the same kind, that the punch can be seen coming some pages ahead of the moment when the author delivers it; and if the punch is all the story has – as is almost invariably the case – nothing remains but Sheckley's incidental wit (or in lesser writers of the same kind, nothing at all).\*

I would further disagree with Amis' contention, on page 101, that satire on individual persons and corporations is universally absent in sf. I'll not resist the temptation to point out that my own "They Shall Have Stars" (first published in England) devotes about a third of its wordage to a personal attack on the late Sen. McCarthy, a point U.S. McCarthyites – as my mail showed – were quick to recognize. McCarthy indeed was quite a favourite target of American sf, as was only to have been expected; for instance see Kornbluth's "Take-Off" or the more recent "The Manchurian Candidate". Corporations? Well, the higher echelons of General Electric were in no doubt whose ox was being gored in Kurt Vonnegut's "Player Piano", as I know from having worked for one of their public relations agencies that year, and this book we can be sure Amis has read (see his page 149). Nor was a drug company that I worked for in any doubt about who was being satirized in my own "The Frozen Year", which appeared in England as "Fallen Star" with an Amis jacket endorsement. (In fact, they nearly fired me.) I would not go so far as to maintain that this kind of satire is a common feature of sf, but it's there. Whether or not we need more of it is another question.

A particularly interesting aspect of Amis' book is his personal approach to the history of the genre. He rejects the claims for antiquity of the field made by most of its historians – such as the attempts by de Camp and Moskowitz, among others, to capture

\* This point is discussed at greater length in "The Issue at Hand".

Lucian of Samosota as an ancestor – maintaining instead that modern sf is a peculiarly Twentieth-Century phenomenon, with earlier roots in Well *et al.* but becoming significant only with the advent of the American specialized magazines in 1926. I do not think he makes a very good case for this, for it seems to me that it is impossible to understand much of what is going on in modern sf, particularly among the satirists whom Mr. Arnis so much admires, without at least some reference to the Nineteenth Century Utopians; but his view has at least the merit of limiting his universe of discourse to what is characteristic of sf as it is practiced now. It is probably true that in this universe, the “marvellous voyages” of antiquity have very little significance, except to fans in search of respectability.

Despite these various dissents, however, “New Maps of Hell” was a job that badly needed to be done, and for the most part has been done wondrously well. Like the de Camp, it now needs revision; let us hope that both get it.

\* \* \* \*

## THE EDITORS

### *Other Critical Works*

**“The Issue at Hand”, by William Atheling, Jr.  
Edited and with an introduction by James Blish.  
Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1964.**

At the risk of establishing a new record in incestuousness (the reviewer reviewing the reviews of the review reviewer) “The Issue At Hand” by James Blish must be included in any study of the critical writings in this field. It is published by Advent – the only firm exclusively doing critical and appreciative sf books – well bound and produced, and hidden inside what must be the most pretentious book jacket ever conceived. (Inspired by Michelangelo’s *Creation*, a gigantic and God-like hand transmits life to a nude figure – floating in space against a lenticular galaxy – who in turn passes on the *elan vital* to a species of roller skate-bearing robot. The symbolism is a little obscure – do the withered genitalia on the nude figure identify it as a writer? – and is the God-hand that of the critic? Perhaps it is the publisher and the life force is money.) Atheling is the pen-name Blish adopted to write reviews for various fanmags, the source of most of the material in this book.

The worst that can be said about this volume is that it reflects the weakness of its antecedents (a fact Blish admits and makes no attempt to defend in his introduction.) The pieces are short, a lot of them dated, most of them reviews of individual issues of different magazines. It is a tribute to the author's ability that he holds attention and interest in spite of this. He has a good deal of wit and humour – why can't we see more of it in his fiction? – and a remarkably acid tongue with which he flays to destruction such incompetents as Arthur Zirul. Yet he is constructive in his destruction, making general points about the craft of writing that have relevancy to anyone who tries to write anything more serious than a note to the milkman. Perhaps his greatest strength is his ability to find things of interest in works that are themselves basically uninteresting.

There should be more. Because of the spotty nature of its construction, in this book Blish barely has a chance to sink his critical teeth into the flesh of a literary work before he is jerked away from it. He should have a chance to worry it to the bone. This volume is a successful signpost and I hope its author will look upon it that way. What he needs to do now is find a book-length critical theme – something in the nature of "New Maps of Hell" – and produce a volume-complete unto itself. That is a book we would like to read. We suspect it would be a worthy addition to the field.

None of the volumes considered here have been published in England, with the sole exception of "New Maps of Hell," where it did much to raise the standing of sf, or at least to clobber the hostile critics.

With the honorable exception of Mr. Amis, the English critics of sf have sounded a cranky, tweedy note that from beyond these islands must seem dangerously characteristic. These critics, unlike the American ones, have come from outside or from partly outside the sf field. For the sake of completeness, three of their volumes may be mentioned here.

Patrick Moore's "Science and Fiction" appeared in 1957. Patrick Moore is an amateur astronomer, appears regularly on BBC TV and is something of a television personality; he has written some juvenile sf. "Science and Fiction" deals, in a rather heavily humorous way, with odd bits of sf, but the total effect is of a man called upon to discourse on an unprepared subject. Moore's preference is for the more scientific story; indications are that he was fairly conversant with the sf field before the Second World War.

Later in 1957, Roger Lancelyn Green's "Into Other Worlds" appeared. Green took the opposite view to Moore. He has no time for science, enjoys fantasies like "Lieutenant Gulliver Jones", and has very little time for Stapledon or Wells, though he tries manfully to conceal his dislike of the latter. When up at Oxford, Green was under C. S. Lewis's tutelage; for Lewis is reserved Green's warmest praise, to Lewis the book is dedicated. But Lewis's reason for writing was nearer metaphysics than physics; presumably it is because Green feels so much the same way that his normally sound literary judgement leads him, in this inconsistent but intelligent book, to rank Edgar

Rice Burroughs along with "Perelandra".

Peter Leighton's "Moon Travellers" (1960) reads rather like a quickie, written to cash in on the first satellites. His book is useful because it quotes from early fictitious journeys in space, although the criticism it offers of modern writers is almost nil. We are told that Jules Verne's visions of the future make the sf writers of today seem "very leaden-footed earthmen". In fact, a useful critical book would be a classification of science fictional ideas that would show just how much and how wide the sf writer's imagination has ranged over recent decades.

1. *The Science Fiction Novel*. Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1959-1964. 160 pp., indexed; boards.
2. AMIS, KINGSLEY: *New Maps of Hell*. Harcourt Brace, 1960; 161 pp., indexed; boards. Ballantine Books, New York, undated (1961). 144 pp., indexed; paper. Gollancz, London, 1961; 161 pp., indexed, with English introduction; boards.
3. ATHELING, JR., WILLIAM (James Blish): *The Issue at Hand*. Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1964. 136 pp., indexed; boards and paper.
4. DAY, DONALD B: *Index to the Science Fiction Magazines*. 1926-1950. Perri Press, Portland, Ore., 1952. 184 pp., boards; updated 1964, MIT Science Fiction Society, Cambridge, Mass.
5. DE CAMP, L. SPRAGUE: *Science Fiction Handbook*. Hermitage House, New York, 1953. 328 pp., indexed; boards.
6. ESHBACH, LLOYD ARTHUR, ed: *Of Worlds Beyond*. 2nd edition, Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1964. 104 pp., indexed; boards.
7. KNIGHT, DAMON: *In Search of Wonder*. Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1956. xii + 180 pp., indexed; boards.
8. MOSKOWITZ, SAM: *Explorers of the Infinite*. World Publishing Co., Cleveland-New York, 1963. 354 pp., indexed; boards.
9. ROGERS, ALVA: *A Requiem for Astounding*. Advent: Publishers, Chicago, 1964. xxiv + 224 pp., indexed; boards.

#### English Offerings

10. MOORE, PATRICK. *Science and Fiction*. George Harrap, London, 1957. 192 pp., indexed; boards.
11. GREEN, ROGER LANCELYN: *Into Other Worlds*. Space Flight in Fiction, from Lucian to Lewis. Abelard-Schuman, London, 1957. 190 pp., indexed; boards.
12. LEIGHTON, PETER: *Moon Travellers*. A Dream that is becoming a Reality. Oldbourne, London, 1960. 240 pp., boards.

## Japanese SF

The author is a well known Japanese literary critic who writes a daily column for the Tokyo newspaper, "Yomiuri Shimbun". This column appeared on the 21st of October, 1964, and has been translated from the Japanese by Dr. Leon E. Stover.

Whatever the reason, sf has not been popular in Japan up until now, though there are a small number of maniacal fans who form a tight ingroup. It has been said that the Japanese dislike science and are weak in imagination, but this is not true. The populace in general is not averse to science, only those literary dilettanti overwhelmed by an inferiority complex. The simplest explanation of why sf never became popular before is that up until now not much good sf from abroad had been translated, so most Japanese had no way of knowing how interesting this genre of writing can be.

The same thing happened with detective fiction, which at first claimed the attention only of the aficionados of a select number of foreign works. With the appearance of a writer like Matsumoto Seicho a large new readership was captured overnight. Sf probably opened up to a wider public with "The Apache Tribe", by Komatsu Sakyo, though owing to its scientific defects "The Apache Tribe" may not be classed as sf in the strictest sense (people in the story become iron eaters). On the other hand the novel deals realistically with contemporary Japan, the tone is satiric and the narrative highly energetic, and these qualities attracted a large audience which never before had read sf. Everybody agreed they got a kick out of it and felt relieved the way things were resolved. Here in this consistent audience reaction is an indication that the work contains the essential elements which go to make up sf.

In a recent novel by the same author, "Resurrection Day", Komatsu treats a *fin du globe* theme, but mankind comes to an end not as a result of nuclear war but of universal infection by a malignant virus called "M80". The fault in this story is that the author gives away his clues at the beginning of the novel. With the spread of the flu, professional baseball is stopped, streetcars are halted - that's good sf writing in the sense that such happenings cannot be dealt with interestingly except in sf. The artistically worked short stories of Hoshi Shinichi also are notable.

Unlike American sf, which started as pulp literature, Japanese sf began as mainstream literature. The first lengthy work of Japanese sf, "Fourth Interglacial Period", was written by Abe Kimifusa, a very serious literary artist. Significantly, this work was serialized in *Sekai*, one of the two top intellectual magazines in Japan. Certainly we can say that in a broad sense Abe's "Woman of the Dunes"

and "Beautiful Star", by Mishima Yukio both belong to sf. It well may be inevitable today that if a writer means to criticize civilization or wishes to liberate his imagination, his work will take the form of sf. Perhaps in the future when mainstream literature comes to a dead end it will be sf that will carry on.

## FRANCESCO BIAMONTI

### *Italian Science-Fiction*

#### *A Difficult Coming of Age*

When a publisher of the mainstream announces, in Italy, that a new book of an already well-known Italian author is coming out he feels obliged to issue to the press some introductory comments on the author's personality. This is common to all publishers, even in those peculiar countries which have managed to stay out of the European Common Market but, if the new book happens to be a sf novel (or is presented as such), the presentation or the review copies sent to the literary critics or to the newspapers in order to obtain a perfunctory review on the "third page" (the literary page of the Italian daily papers) are unavoidably accompanied by some special notes as a justification. It is interesting to have a look at these notes which are very often located on the front or back flaps of the book's cover. You will learn from them that the author's father is an outstanding physicist, that his mother writes and speaks Arabic fluently and that the author himself is a distinguished humanist who happens to have won a university degree in electronics on account of the strange cases of life but that this casual occurrence does not seem to have impaired in the least the humanist flavour of his cultural background. The rest of the notes tries openly to persuade the reader that writing sf is not, after all, a major crime nor that reading it is in any way comparable to what the Americans would call a "federal offence" and in any case, just to be sure, it is not against any specific commandment of the Church. The writer appears to be a really respectable person and a good chap too who, in his spare time (a passing fad you see), has happened to write a book in the best lines of Franz Kafka's or Aldous Huxley's works.

You come to the book eventually, you read it and find that it is quite true that there is much Kafka in it as some of the main characters' words and actions seem to get to nowhere at all whilst a certain detached way of dealing with sex problems is doubtlessly reminiscent of something Huxley wrote somewhere or of a fading memory of it.

As to sf I am afraid you won't find much of it in the book.

This attitude of the "big" publishers towards sf written by Italian authors of the mainstream is very often echoed by the official critic and is one of the reasons preventing Italian sf to come of age and to

assert itself with the general public, the more so as usually the attempts at sf by even famous authors of the mainstream are so clumsily made that you won't need to be an expert to spot the non-existence of a sensible yarn under the cover of an often precious style.

As a consequence the Italian authors who write mainly sf are compelled to adopt – as a kind of self-defence – a polemic attitude which sometimes leads them to overdo and to stuff their stories with sophisticated and also cryptic wanderings into the prohibited realms of history, philosophy, psychology and esoterism. It is a reaction against the inferiority complex that the critics are trying to label on them. As a result many of their works are far from being entertaining and when ill-advised fans of American space-operas happen to come across to a book which is "fauve" in style, cabalistic in expression and difficult to understand they will drop it after the first ten pages. Thence a lack of supporters and a subject for hot arguments among the writers themselves.

In Italy translations of the current American, British and French sf literature are largely available and are simply ignored by the critics. Specialized periodicals, some of which with a wide circulation, have been publishing since ten years or so the works of the most popular Anglo-Saxon authors and have sometimes had even the courage of smuggling among them novels and short stories written by Italian authors under the cover of anglo-saxon pen names. Needless to say that most of the readers have never been able to make the difference. It is also true that some of the "classics" are still unknown to the Italian readers who do not know English. I feel we should all be grateful to Roberta Rambelli, the life and soul of the Italian SF Book Club and a writer herself, for having given to the press in 1964 an excellent translation of "A Canticle for Leibowitz" and for trying to keep at a dignified level the monthly publication "Galassia" with the translation of significant books such as Harrison's "Bill, the Galactic Hero" and the introduction of young authors carefully picked up among the Italians.

Should we be rather drastic in our judgement – it's also a matter of space – we would draw a line marking a clean separation between, on one side, the large production of horse-operas barely backed by a galactic setting where the main male character strikingly resembles Fleming's James Bond who has donned a space-suit for the occasion, published under foreign pen-names and, on the other side, the very few books on which the Italian authors' names appear in full letters. It is in the second class that we obviously find the most interesting Italian production which includes some significant works.

To quote a few titles: "Il Cavallo Venduto" (The Sold Horse) by Giorgio Scerbanenco, a well-known author of adulcorated love stories, who has succeeded in writing an effective and serious novel along a "post-atomic" yarn. "Il Robot ed il Minotauro" (The Robot and the Minotaur) by Roberto Vacca, an expert in the field of electronic computers at a university level, who presents a handsome collection of stories written with a smart touch of detachment on the subject of the

relations between the human brain and the robot-like electronic machines. "Il grande ritratto" (The big portrait) by Dino Buzzati, a well-known author of the mainstream who spends some elegance in re-writing on an old theme.

Among the "professionals" I feel one should mention "Il sistema del benessere" (The System of Welfare) by Ugo Malaguti, a very young author who happens to have written one of the rare books based on social sf in Italy, plenty of imagination, only the style needs further refinement.

As to the periodicals, only one of them, i.e., "Futuro" is primarily devoted to the Italian authors and its editor Massimo Lo Jacono likes to stress this fact as a symptom of the situation of the Italian writers which I have tried to outline in brief, though he is sure of the quality and the possibilities of Italian sf. Some "all Italian" anthologies have also appeared such as the "Interplanet" series, a special issue of "Galassia" came out in 1961, "Fantascienza: terrore o verita?" edited by Roberta Rambelli and Andrea Canal, "I labirinti del terzo pianeta" edited by Gilda Musa and Inisero Cremaschi, "Esperimenti con l'ignoto" and some minor ones.

Some daily papers have tried the "serial" kind with a result which is too early to judge at this time. Even in this form of publication the professional sf writers seem to have done much better than the known writers of the mainstream who have tried it.

But I cannot close without mentioning the essayists and, one for all, Professor Umberto Eco, a university teacher, who has had the opportunity of explaining sf to the general public on TV on which job he came off with flying colours after three weekly transmissions. Professor Eco is the author of many essays and studies on literary, social and psychological topics among which I would quote the study published under the title "Apocalittici ed Integrati" on the subject of mass communications, mass media and theories of mass culture. In this book, at the chapter devoted to the sf literature, he puts a particular stress on the necessity of enlightening on what sf is and could be, the average readers who hurriedly and unawaredly scan, at home or in a train just before getting asleep, the pages of the sole manuals of devotional literature that the industrial civilization allows them to read.

## CABINET OF CURIOSITIES. No. 2

"Unduma shuddered, beneath the iridescent cloak, embroidered robe, and ostrich-plume headress of his rank. He swept the ante-chamber with the eyes of a trapped animal."

Poul Anderson: "AMONG THIEVES"  
**Case of a gnu broom at work, maybe.**



*With a Piece of Twisted Wire . . .*

E. E. Smith's books are prominent landmarks in the historical landscape of sf, and his 1928 novel "The Skylark of Space" has long been considered a classic of the sub-genre known as "world destroyers". The hero of this drama, over a period of a few weeks, has invented a score of miraculous devices and journeyed to a distant planet in his newly built space cruiser. There he encounters a race of aliens who, while baffled by his sleight-of-hand tricks, are very quick on the uptake when it comes to physics. They take a quick peek at the ship's engines, all sealed and shielded of course, and this is the result:

"No Osmonian has ever had any inkling that such a thing as atomic energy exists. Nevertheless, after his study of your engines, Nalboon knows how to liberate it and how to control it."

Good for old Nalboon. He knows perfectly well that if he does not master atomic physics after a quick glance into the reactor, the hero will quickly move on to a planet where the natives have the necessary alacrity of mind to keep up with the plot's headlong pace. These were the generous days of sf, when destroyed universes where a dime a dozen and miraculous inventions as common as flyspecks. Affairs improved during the next decade, but not very much. A single scientific wonder was enough to carry a story, but the wonders were on the same plane of probability as the instantaneous education in atomics. In 1935 Stanley G. Weinbaum published his story "The Worlds of If", wherein the professor invents a gadget to peer into the parallel universes. Here is how the inventor describes it:

"I use polarized light, polarized not in the horizontal or vertical planes, but in the direction of the fourth dimension - an easy matter. One uses Iceland spar under colossal pressures, that is all. And since the worlds are very thin in the direction of the fourth dimension, the thickness of a single light wave, though it be but millionths of an inch, is sufficient."

To attempt to analyze this science - or Smith's rapid-learner - would be nonsensical. Both are merely devices to move the story along, the idea is here and everyone, including the author, is in a hurry to see what will be revealed. Weinbaum wants to get us to the worlds of If, and if squeezing a crystal is the fastest way - on go the clamps. Smith wants to show us colour slides of alien worlds and strange inventions, and when one is finished *click*, it is gone and the next one flashes on. These stories were written in the first blush of sf's youth, when the rules were made up as you went along. Writers, editors and

fans had an awe of science and a social naivete that is completely unknown in these sophisticated days.\*

Almost 30 years have passed since these first steps were taken, and satellites, Venus shots, hydrogen bombs and DNA chains are an accepted part of life now. As science has advanced so has sf, a number of practitioners of science now write sf; the writing has improved as has the content. Therefore I was not prepared for the sharp blow over the heart that I felt when I recently read the book version of "Address: Centauri", by F. L. Wallace. The story was blighted for me by the errors of simple science, trains of illogic and errors of fact that were sifted into the story with massive liberality. A single example will suffice.

On page 76 of the paperback edition (Galaxy Science Fiction Novel No. 32) I found this statement: "Jeriann . . . is a normal pretty woman - outwardly. However she has no trace of a digestive system. The maximum time she can go without food or fluid absorption is ten hours." This jarred me. It is not the mechanics of her ailment that cause the trouble: she is supposed to have lost her complete digestive apparatus when an automobile hit her. A leap of the imagination can have these parts, and only these, removed in the crash: a nicely aligned bumper might achieve the desired disemboweling action. The thing that really bothers is the complete ignorance of *contemporary* medical knowledge. It is an established fact that a human being, living quietly in a cool area, can survive for eight to ten *days* - not hours - without water. The situation as regards nourishment is even more dramatically different, since one can live for thirty or forty days without food. Therefore the ten hours survival figure for Jeriann is about as scientifically credible as those cinematic favorites, the elephant sized insects.

This ten-hour-death is not an isolated example. Poor Jeriann, lovely heroine that she is, is made to suffer as no human has ever suffered before. It isn't until page 190, the page before last, that her painful secret is finally revealed. When she was struck down, as a young girl, she had been very thirsty, and was rushing for a drink of water. But she has not had a drink since that fatal day. "Twenty years of thirst." Another character gloomily recounts. "... nothing moist in her house. The shower spouts fine dry particles." I should think, offhand, that all this dusty dryness would increase her thirst, but the point is disputable. We can grant Mr. Wallace his dust bath, but we cannot accept the twenty years of thirst. There is absolutely no reason for Jeriann to ever be thirsty, since she has special capsules that supply her with needed food and water through her skin. These would take care of the sensation of thirst, since this has nothing at all

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\* The same issue of "Wonder Stories" that carried the Weinbaum tale also contained another story which used that novel idiom "... like a veneer". The editor carefully defined the noun in a footnote, "A thin wood, used for covering".

These footnotes many times make better reading than the copy. In a later issue *neutrons* is asterisked, and said to be, "Atoms in a solid mass". Which is very wrong, even for 1935.

to do with the digestive apparatus. A quick glimpse at a text book would have revealed to Mr. Wallace that it is the ratio of salt to water in the body cells and bloodstream that causes thirst. Any imbalance signals osmoreceptors in the bloodstream, which in turn trigger the thirst sensations.

Because of her physical impairment we are told that Jeriann can never take a drink of water. This is sloppy thinking. Since the girl can talk, the most that the miraculous auto bumper could have hooked out was the esophagus as high up as her larynx. There is nothing therefore to stop her from taking a mouthful of water, swishing it around - even gargling with it - then spitting it out. We are supposed to feel sorry for this lass with the dry mouth, when a second's thought shows us that quite the contrary would be true. She must still salivate, and being unable to swallow she risks drowning in her own sputum unless she has a good spit now and then. Instead of dust showers and desert pictures, her private chambers should be outfitted with drinking fountains and a number of spittoons.

Let us leave poor, disemboweld Jeriann to her cuspidors and kleenex and attempt to discover just what has gone wrong with this book. It seems simple enough. Stumbling over these physiological bloopers has destroyed our sense of involvement, done away with Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief" that allows us to enjoy sf. We are offended by these ignorings of known fact, the book is filled with them and much of the plot turns about them. If they are false the book is false.

Which brings us to the important point of the sf writer's primary responsibility: he must know the basic facts of the science he is writing about, while at the same time must have a good grounding in general science. There is no excuse for lack of this essential information, though many are offered. An oft heard cry is that sf does not pay enough to justify the research needed. This is a typical statement of consumer-man and organization-man, and heard oftener in America than England. Expected financial return has nothing to do with the quality of the story while it is being written. The artist must be the whole artist and do his absolute best with each try, or he is not an artist. Stating it simply - or over-simply - there are bad writers, indifferent writers, and writers. The bad ones will probably be always with us: let us skip over them quickly. The writers are the ones who work sincerely at what Percy Lubbock calls "the craft of fiction". The indifferent writers fall, for a number of reasons, in between these two. It is obvious that Wallace is indifferent. He has chosen to write about medicine and has not bothered to acquaint himself with any of the basic facts of this science. He has adulterated his sf with nonsense-science, and is just as guilty as the food adulterator who slips the carcinogen into his bread dough. Both can plead ignorance, but it is not a good enough defence.

Wallace is guilty of negligence. If he has neither the time nor interest to check his theories against a text book or two, then he has no business writing sf. He certainly has the intelligence and the

ability to search out these basic facts. About the only thing that can be said in his defence is that he has not been required to. The sf magazine editors – with a single exception – make no stringent demands for accuracy or logic in science. Very often they do quite the opposite. In a recent issue of *Amazing* a reader – who happens to be a university student – wrote in a mild protest about a story that ignored some simple physical facts, errors that would be obvious to anyone whose knowledge of mechanics had never passed the fulcrum and lever stage. The editor responded, "...our aim is to offer good entertaining stories without checking out each tiny fact with the experts at the Rand Corporation or MIT." Wonderful. I am more grateful than ever for John W. Campbell after reading a statement like that.

Sf cannot be good without respect for good science. This may be a tautology, but it is so often ignored that it must be clearly stated. This does not include time machines, space warps and the fifth dimension; they will continue to exist in the hazy borderland between sf and fantasy. But it *does* include everything else in these stories once the warp has been jumped or the centuries spanned. If sf has one canon that cannot be disputed, it is the One Assumption Per Story, first formularized by H. G. Wells.

All of which is very true, but it is not the entire story. When the sf writer has obeyed these rules, hewed to his single new assumption per story and respected the sciences as we know them – had he also written something we want to read? All too often the answer is an unhappy and tremulous no. It leaves out of account an essential element that, for want of a better word, I shall call *art*. This is the ingredient that all published writers have to a greater or lesser extent and the factors that keep us interested and reading even though the basic idea of the story is old or we are re-reading the work in question. Dickens had it in excess. Bare outlines of his plots sound like rejected suggestions for Pearl White scripts. Yet on these calcified bones he constructed living bodies of work, and the breath of this life was his art. This kind of writing is so rare as to be next to nonexistent in sf.

John Buchan had it. You can smell the glens and the cigar smoke in the aristocratic drawing rooms, and enjoy his books – even though he wrote about a dream world where the totally magnanimous upper classes took care of the totally feeble minded lower classes, and all the villains are foreigners or Jews. He was not one quarter the writer that Dickens was, but he is a marvellous entertainer because his works breathe conviction.

There have been entirely too many novels about ambitious young men impregnating young ladies to gain there evil ends, yet John Braine's "Room at the Top" was a most successful book because it entrapped the reader with its overwhelming sense of conviction.

What do these three very disparate writers have in common? They have the ability to take materials we have read before, that we disbelieve, that is pat and cliché, and transform it into literature. They are artists.

Everything I have said about the need for accurate science, hard

science, correct scientific outlook in sf, is true. But I haven't mentioned art. I might never have done so if it hadn't been for James Blish's "Is This Thinking?" (SFH No. 1). I still might not have mentioned it if he had stopped at Ray Bradbury: I have never been a Bradbury enthusiast because his hatred and fear of science – as well as his lack of any rudimentary knowledge of it – has always offended me so much I could never appreciate his other talents. But Blish has taken it upon himself to attack Brian W. Aldiss and this I cannot accept.

Blish has no case. He does not mention a single one of, what he terms, Aldiss's "bloopers", though he does attack Aldiss for something he identifies only as "the most remarkable of his bloopers". I will be happy to identify it, it is one of the most colourful and exciting concepts I have ever read in sf – the spiderwebs in "Hothouse" that connect the Earth and the Moon. I frankly doubt if this idea can be supported logically – but unlike Blish I couldn't care less.

How does this jibe with my earlier statements concerning the importance of scientific accuracy? The answer is a simple one: the Master is allowed liberties that the Student is incapable of doing. When I was studying to be an aircraft instrument technician my instructor – an old watchmaker with an artist's touch to the jeweller's lathe – used to say "Don't do as I do, do as I say," while breaking his own rules of operation. Picasso did magnificent academic paintings (see his *Lady in White*) before going on into abstractionism. My painting maestro, the incomparable portraitist, John Blomshield, used to say – as he painfully taught me the art of mixing oils – you can't build a house without learning to lay bricks. All of which adds up to one thing: you can't break the rules until you know them.

Brian W. Aldiss knows all the rules. He has a formidable knowledge of the sciences that interest him most, try him on palaeontology or soliology some time, and an enthusiastic reading knowledge of the others. If he wanted to be commonplace his head could lead him through enough scientific plot convolutions and developments to please even Hugo himself. Luckily he is guided by his heart – and he has the heart of an artist. He has a magnificent vision and a true writer's talent to get it on paper. If he – occasionally – violates the laid-down dictums of science, I for one don't give a damn. In his heart he is pure. He does not hate the scientific works of man or wish to flee them with a child's mind like Bradbury. He does not suffer from the moronic scientific disability of Matheson. He is not a victim of the illogical pseudo-scientific enthusiasms of van Vogt. He is not hampered by the narrow moralistic engineering viewpoint of Heinlein. He respects the theories and facts and world-attitudes of science, and when they clash with his inner artistic vision he has the good sense to follow where his instincts lead.

Let me counterattack and press hard on the critic. I don't think there will ever be spindizzies that will sail the City of New York off to the far reaches of the universe. I don't think there is such a thing as lycanthropy, much less a scientific basis for it. I don't think that even the Wicked Russians will ever use helpless children to pilot flying

bombs, not that one of them would dream in bad technicolour while dying, nor that another person might be able to read those dying thoughts. I don't believe any of these things ever could or will happen – yet I enjoyed the stories based on them while reading them. I don't believe spiderwebs will ever connect our planet and its satellite – but what a tremendous and poetic image that is!

Perhaps it comes down to that. Our chosen field is so barren of poetry, art, imagery – add any terms you wish here – that I welcome it wherever it appears. Thank Anthony Boucher and *F&SF* for permitting it into the field. Bemoan Anthony Boucher for printing too much of it that went too far and was just plain bad.

When art enters sf the usual result is tacky, sickening, purple passages. All those stars like holes in blankets, myriad pinpoints of light, unearthly and eery glimmers in the depths of eyeballs, the whole rotten lot that has hung from the body of sf like gorged leeches ever since it tried to rise from the muck of the pulps. All of the purple passages like the preceding one. I used to moan over the fact that pulp magazines were printed on pulp paper and steadily decompose back towards the primordial from which they sprang. I am beginning to feel that this is a bit of a good thing. We have had enough.

If the new sf writer wants a rule to hew to, it is simply stated. Follow the rules. Write as clearly as accurately, as logically as you can. Learn your trade. Respect the sciences. Follow your craft. If you have it within you to be an artist as well as a craftsman it will come out. But don't walk before you can run. There is a bottomless and constantly-refreshed well of scientific information that you can dip into for inspiration. There are rules, devices and techniques of writing that you may profitably study. After you have studied and worked and sold and worked a little harder you can think about spinning spiderwebs to the moon. If you feel you must do it – and are capable of doing it – go right ahead.

The last man who did it received a Hugo for doing it because he did it so well.

### CABINET OF CURIOSITIES. No. 3

"John Carter has made a proposal," he said, addressing the council, "which meets with my sanction. I shall put it to you briefly. Dejah Thoris, the Princess of Helium, who was our prisoner, is now held by the jeddak of Zodanga, whose son she must wed to save her country from devastation at the hands of the Zodangan forces. John Carter suggests we rescue her and return her to Helium. The loot of Zodanga would be magnificent, and I have often thought that had we an alliance with the people of Helium we could obtain sufficient assurance of sustenance to permit us to increase the size and frequency of our hatchings, and thus become unquestionably supreme among the green men of all Barsoom. What say you?"

Edgar Rice Burroughs: "A PRINCESS OF MARS"  
**I say they just don't plot them that way no more.**

C. C. SHACKLETON

"How Are They All On Deneb IV?"

All right, I know, times are changing. It's the great theme of our age. Ever since evolution and all that, the decades have gone hog wild for change; you'd think there was a law about it. Maybe there is a law about it.

Don't think I'm complaining; I am. Since I was a kid, everything has changed, from the taste of bread to the nature of Africa and China. But at least I thought sf would stay the same.

Instead, what has happened? It's all different. They don't write like Heinlein any more – even Heinlein doesn't. In the old days, you knew exactly where you stood in a story. Take the aliens; back in the Golden Age, when the writers had a bit of a sense of wonder and there were blondes on the covers, you knew the aliens would always be there, endlessly mown down, endlessly picturesque, swarming over endless alien worlds. But nowadays – well, let's take actual cases, he said, reaching eagerly for the May 1940 copy of *Gruelling Science Stories*. The Luftwaffe was plastering London at the time, but thank heavens the American sf writers hadn't got wind of that, and Zago Blinder was still turning out his customary peaceful limpid prose. His May 1940 stint was entitled, with what I've always thought showed considerable skill in alliteration, "The Devils of Deneb IV".

You know how this sort of thing goes right from the start. The pleasure lies in its predictability. Scarcely has the whine (whisper, snarl, thunder) of the landing jets died than the hatch opens and three Earthmen jump (crawl, climb, fall) out and stand looking round Deneb IV. They find the air is breathable and quickly hoist the flag (Old Glory, U.N. banner, Stars and Stripes).

Up to now, we readers have been carried along breathlessly (restlessly, hesitantly, mindlessly) on the flood of the author's prose, full of admiration for the way in which he has so economically created a situation so distinct from our own humdrum world. More, the old-timers among us are full of gratitude for his dropping the first three (four, six, twelve) chapters describing the construction of the spaceship in someone's back yard and its long eventful journey to Deneb which were once considered compulsory in this sort of exercise.

Now, however, comes an awkward pause. We have been brought painlessly through what the textbooks call Building Up Atmosphere, Establishing Environment, Creating Character, and so on. The idyllic mood must be shattered. It is time to Introduce the Action.

"Look!" gasps (coughs, barks, yells) the captain, pointing with trembling (rigid, scarred, nicotine-stained) finger at the nearby hill (jungle, ocean, ruined temple). His crewmen follow the line of his

finger tip, and there approaching them they see an angry group (ugly bunch, slaving horde, slobbering herd) of Denebians who are plainly out for blood as they gallop (surge, slime, esp) towards the spaceship.

You must admit this is value for money, particularly if you only borrowed the magazine. In no time, the three intrepid explorers are back in their ship and the vile Denebians are trying to scratch their way in through the cargo hatch.

What more could you ask for? Personally, I asked for nothing more; I had had enough by the time I came across this situation for the fiftieth time. It was not boredom so much as bravery. The Denebians weren't what they used to be. However mindless and merciless they got, I was no longer scared. I developed immunity. Yet, for all that, I liked things the way they were. The more unsociably those aliens behaved, the more I realised how superior we Earthmen were.

Then things became less straightforward. I was rifling through *Microscopic Sex Wonder* during the boom year of 1951 when I realised that Deneb was no longer the same. They'd dared to alter the plot!

This time, the aliens didn't appear when the flag was hoisted. Everything was peaceful – too peaceful. Our three chums wandered among beautiful trees, or they found charming people like themselves but nicer, with sweet old mums sitting knitting on the porch, and Pa sucking a corn cob and spittin' to avoid bunches of rosy-cheeked kids, or else they found nothing there at all except the waving grass.

You remember what happened, don't you? Those beautiful trees, that grand old granny, those cheeky kids, that expanse of nothing, that sneaky grass, was really our old Denebians in disguise. Yes, sir! Freud had hit sf by this date, and the old slobbering hordes were back in full force only nastier, because they could thought-warped themselves as grannies or grass and get into the ship and cause chaos. That was a terrible era, and I don't know how I survived it. Story after story, I had to face utter mind-wrenching terror.

I grew to love it.

Then they went and changed the plot again! I knew just how things were going and was all set to relax when the editors or whoever it is that insists on these things – for sure it's not the writers – altered the orthodoxy.

I can pinpoint the date exactly when I realised something had gone wrong. I had bought the Jannish – sorry, the January issue of *The Monthly of Whimsey and Whammo-Science*, 1960, and was leafing through this story by Piledriver Jones entitled "On Deneb Deep My Pleasure Stalks". Funny, I thought, the title doesn't sound right, they've started mucking around with the titles now, is nothing sacred? But since I wanted to find out if a pleasure stalk was what I thought it was (it wasn't), I forced myself to read on.

You can't fail to recall the story, not only because it has since been anthologised fifty-two times and won a Hank, but because it started a new trend. This is the one where they arrive on Deneb IV all right, in this funny ship that rides solar winds, but some sort of bug gets them and they all grow extra limbs; the captain alone grows twelve big toes,



fourteen left arms, a spare pair of buttocks, two girl's knees, and a horse's head. And then they sit around and talk philosophy, not minding at all, until in the end it turns out that back on Earth things are even worse because people are terribly short of horse's heads and buttocks and knee caps and things.

Let's have no false modesty – I can adjust to anything. But it needs about twenty years to adjust to that sort of plot. And what happens? Already, *already*, they've altered the line again. That's what I mean about change running hog wild.

Just this year the new orthodoxy has set in. Look at this month's crop of magazines – it's not a very big crop these days, because people won't read unless they know what to expect – look at *Monolog*, look at *Off*, look at *Odious Fantasy* and *Lewd Worlds* and *Gallimaufry*, and what do you find? Not a darned one of them has a story set on Deneb IV!

Not a darned one of them has a story set on any alien planet! They're all Earth stories, everyone, though *Monolog* has this nine-part serial set in England at the time of the Norman Conquest, with William the Conqueror finding cases of telepathy among the peasants. Otherwise, nothing! Russians, psi powers, medicine, psychology, sociology, politics, traffic problems, robots, nuclear wars, funny little tales about fellows meeting aliens and not realising it, oh yes, no shortage of all that sort of stuff, and, of course, plenty of drowned, crystallised, rainless, bug-ridden, childless, adultless, metal-less doodles, witless worlds, all of them Earth. But not a single story set on another planet.

I'd chuck in my hand. I would. I'd give up. I'd never bother to try and read another sf story in another magazine in my life. There just happens to be one small thing that gives me grounds for hope.

*Lewd Worlds* has a little cameo, not more than a thousand words long, about this chap who seduces this girl and then creeps into his back yard and builds his own rocket ship. He has this secret perverted desire to reach the stars, see?

It's only a matter of sweating it out a few more years, boys. We'll get back to Deneb one day. The times they are a-changing.

#### CABINET OF CURIOSITIES. No. 4

"The women of Shun are tall and strong, bred to stand beside their men in war as well as love . . ."

Leigh Brackett: "THE SECRET OF SINHARAT."  
**Isn't it rather uncomfortable in that position?**

## ON THE ATOMIC BOMB

### Metrical Experiment

*So; you have found an engine  
Of injury that angels  
Might dread. The world plunges,  
Shies, snorts, and curvets like a horse in danger.*

*Then comfort her with fondlings,  
With kindly word and handling.  
But do not believe blindly  
This way or that. Both fears and hopes are swindlers.*

*What's here to dread? For mortals  
Both hurt and death were certain  
Already; our light-hearted  
Hopes from the first sentenced to final thwarting.*

*This marks no huge advance in  
The dance of Death. His pincers  
Were grim before with chances  
Of cold, fire, suffocation, Ogpu, cancer.*

*Nor hope that this last blunder  
Will end our woes by rending  
Tellus herself asunder—  
All gone in one bright flash like dryest tinder.*

*As if your puny gadget  
Could dodge the terrible logic  
Of history! No; the tragic  
Road will go on, new generations trudge it.*

*Narrow and long it stretches,  
Wretched for one who marches  
Eyes front. He never catches  
A glimpse of the fields each side, the happy orchards.*

C. S. LEWIS

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